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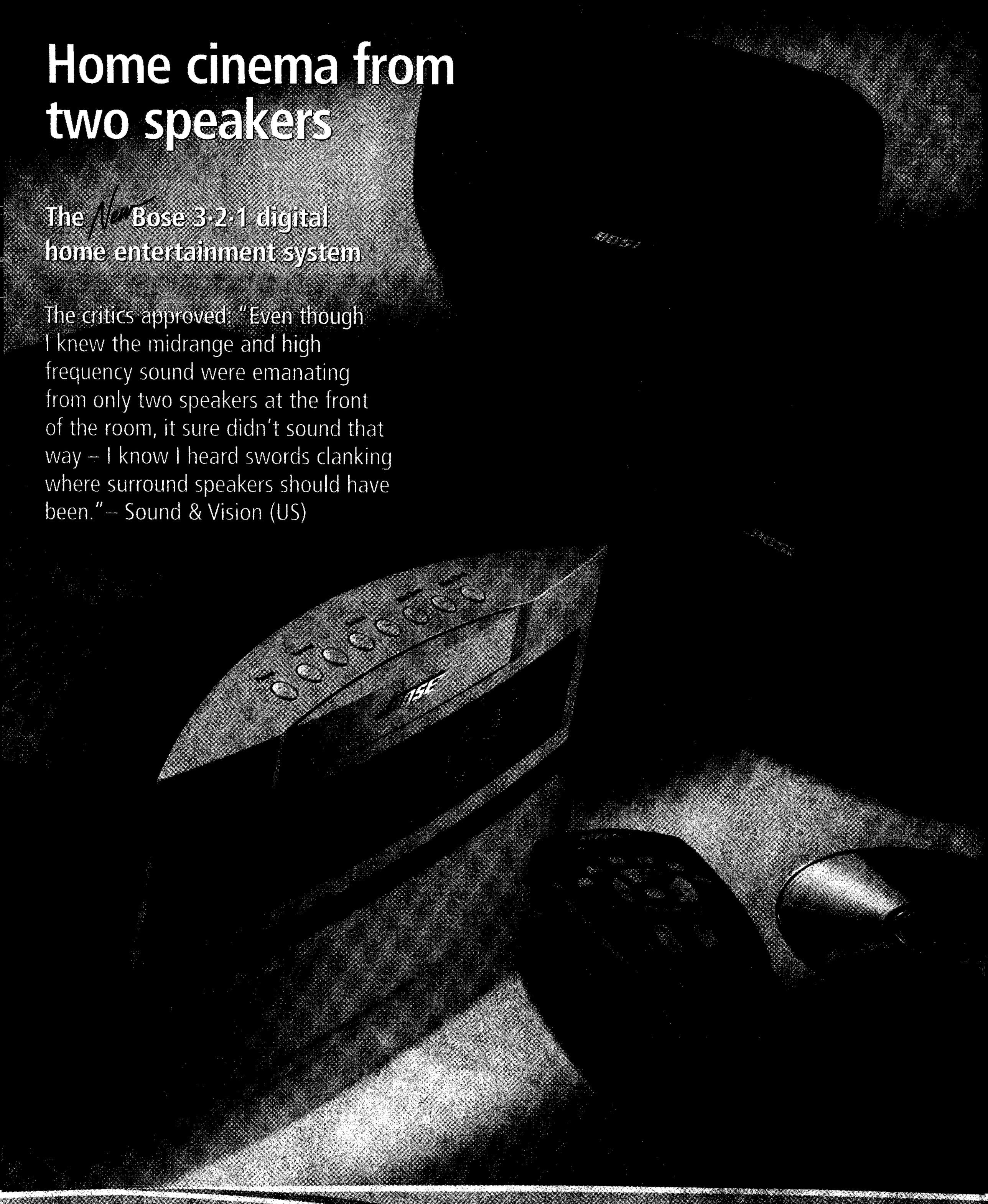

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Gnome

IT IS with deep regret that I pen these words. Britain has never been a dumber nation. The most recent poll in this newspaper showed that the majority of my readers cannot distinguish between Winston Churchill and Phil from *EastEnders*. How have we reached this sorry state of affairs? How have we let this once cultured nation, renowned for such great men and women as *(please fill in suitable names here)* descend to a condition of wilful ignorance and celebrity-obsessed vulgarity? Who is to blame?

On other pages

The Corrie Love Birds Strip Off . . **2**
Emmerdale Dyke Has Baby **3**
Pop Stars On The Toilet **4, 5, 6**
Who Are The Top 100 British TV Presenters? – You Vote . . . **7, 8, 9, 10**

Plus

Kylie's Bum, Robbie's Pants, Beckham's Hair, Diana's Dresses, Barrymore's Tears, Ulrika's Heartache, etc, etc, etc, etc **94**

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NEW OLD SAYINGS

DB/ES

Money For Old Rape

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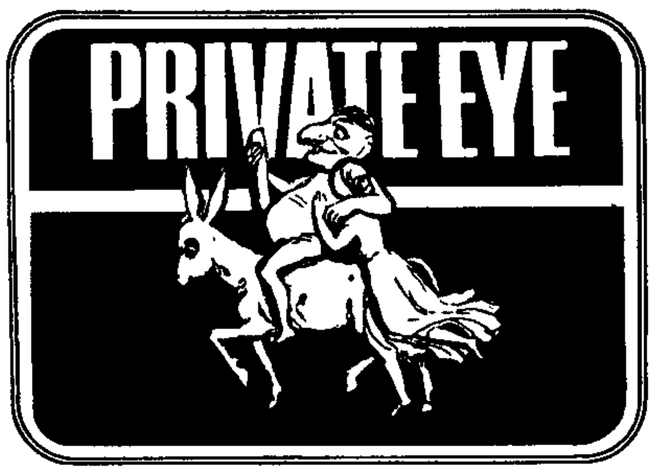


1066 and all that...

- *Browned off? Tina's Times diary* **5**
- *Teach Yourself Charles Clarke: In the Tearoom* **6**
- *Eye TV on the not-so-great Great Britons* **8**
- *The fag end of tobacco advertising? Ad Nauseam* **9**
- *Completely round the Benn: Tony's Diary* **23**
- *Mohamed, a false profit? Slicker* **28, 29**

LAST minute attempts to get the Fire Brigades Union to call off this week's planned stoppages were almost derailed by Tony Blair.

The Dear Leader's claim that FBU general secretary Andy Gilchrist and his executive were latter-day Scargillites infuriated the union bosses and sent John Prescott, who had been deputised to make peace with the firemen, ballistic.

Prescott's task became near impossible after hacks were briefed by Downing Street that the firemen were going to be taken on. But could this be the same Tony Blair who once gushingly told an appreciate audience in County Durham in 1983 that Arthur Scargill "is one of the greatest trade union leaders of our time"?

RAIL unions have suggested closing parts of the rail system for safety reasons if fire fighters go on strike, but how magnanimous is their offer?

Most people denied access to trains will travel by road instead; and by doing so they will be at far greater risk of being involved in an accident than on a train.

Ignoring the bullying memo from Fire Brigade Union reps in the north east which warned ambulance crews not to try to cut car crash victims free from wreckage, if anyone does find themselves trapped in a mangled car they could face a long wait for a green goddess to turn up with cutting equipment.

Road accidents are so common now they make up a large proportion of the fire service's work; but once again hypothetical safety risks on the railways may take precedence over the actual deaths and injuries that happen every day on the roads.

AMEY, a firm deeply reliant on Labour's private finance initiative (PFI), has been in trouble for a while (see *Eyes passim*). It thought that getting closer to Labour would help – so it recruited former minister Baroness Jay as a consultant.

Rules dictated that Jay had to wait until the end of October before being allowed to approach former ministerial colleagues directly on the firm's behalf. But the firm has now plunged into a new crisis – and even Jay's magic may not be able to help.

Michael Kayser, Amey's new finance director, quit after only five weeks in the job. The City rumour is that he left because he discovered that Amey had £90m less assets than it was claiming.

No doubt Jay will be able to advise on honest financial reporting: she was once a trustee of Tony Blair's blind trust and is currently on Labour's "anti-sleaze" committee, vetting the party's financial donors for their moral probity.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Ms Morris has three things going for her. First, she has shown considerable resilience, more steel than many thought she possessed. Second, she is popular with Labour MPs, who have rallied around her, as they did in the Commons on Tuesday. Third, and most important, she has the personal backing of Tony Blair. So Ms Morris is secure in her job."

— Peter Riddell, *Times Educational Supplement*, 18 October.

"There is absolutely no need for the minister [Estelle Morris] to resign... The Tories can bay for her blood until the next full moon, but she will stay in post."

— Paul Routledge, *Daily Mirror*, 18 October.

STEEL producer Corus last week admitted civil liability for the explosion that killed three men at its Port Talbot works in South Wales last November. This will allow its insurers to pay compensation to the injured and to the families of the three who died in the explosion at the plant's No 5 blast furnace.

The bad news for Corus bosses is that they could still face criminal liability and the possibility of a stint at Her Majesty's pleasure. The health and safety executive (HSE) and South Wales Police are continuing to investigate the blast to determine whether Corus has any criminal liability. Their final report is not due until next year, but they are expected to release a statement this week in time for the anniversary of the accident.

In October last year the UK steelworkers union, ISTC, had expressed concern that the blast furnace needed relining, a process which normally takes place every 12 years. Corus management assured them that a reline would not be necessary before 2004. The explosion occurred a month later.

THIS winter's big offering from Carlton TV is *Surprise Wedding*, a two-hour spectacular showing six brides proposing to their unknowing boyfriends in front of a studio audience.

The format was bought for lots of money from Fox Television in the US; and everyone concerned hopes it will become an ongoing feature in the ITV1 schedules to rival *I'm A Celebrity* and *Pop Idol*.

The presenter overseeing this romantic event will guide the starry-eyed brides through their pre-wedding jitters, on-air proposals and marriage ceremonies, and finally see them off on honeymoon. *Surprise Wedding* has already been filmed and edited and the brides and grooms sent to Antigua. And who presents this love-fuelled extravaganza? Step forward Mr John Leslie.

"Charles Clarke's got Blair's ear"

Street Of Shame

WHEN the *Daily Mail* bagged the Ulrika Jonsson memoirs from under the nose of the *Daily Express* there were smug smiles all round. But just weeks later the self-satisfied executives were privately smarting over the experience.

The *Mail* paid £700,000 for four chapters of the book which it knew gave the lowdown on the TV presenter's relationship with England football manager Sven Goran Eriksson. The serialisation which followed was attached to a huge promotional campaign; but most readers felt they'd already heard the highs and lows of the love triangle between Ulrika, Sven and his girlfriend Nancy Dell'Olio many times before.

When the four chapters were sold to the *Mail*, Ulrika's agent Melanie Cantor mentioned the date rape section in case it wanted to include that as well. The *Mail* made the decision to include the allegation in an interview with Ulrika by Linda Lee-Potter, timed to run just before the serialisation began.

But Lee-Potter failed to include it and *Mail* executives weren't impressed enough by the story to add it to her copy. Then Jonathan Ross's interview with Urika revealed that her alleged attacker was a fellow TV presenter. The gossip machine went into overdrive, the news agenda was taken over by the story – and a livid *Mail* editor Paul Dacre and his minions were left wondering how they'd let the biggest Ulrika revelation of all slip through their fingers.

THE *Sun*'s pisspoor "Hands Off Our Booze Cruise" campaign has generated sacks of hostile mail, not least for treasury minister John Healy.

The rag, which has devoted acres of space to the troubles readers are having trying to bring shed-loads of cheap drink into Britain, has been picking on chancellor Gordon Brown's right hand man, John Healy. It even published his constituency telephone number and postal address so they could tell him what they think.

When readers – some 130 in one day – phoned to tell Healy what they thought, they got through instead to two struggling workers in the MP's Yorkshire constituency. Those who wrote had even less luck. The *Sun* printed the wrong address and, ten doors down from the local Labour Party offices, a shocked pensioner received sacks of mail from deluded readers.

TORY lovebirds John Major and Edwina Currie didn't discuss Uganda at all during their four-year love-fest, according to the *Jewish Chronicle*.

Instead, on billboards promoting its coverage of the relationship, it revealed "EDWINA'S JEWISH CHATS WITH JOHN MAJOR". The world of euphemism will never be the same again...

BACK in May, we revealed the strenuous attempts by *Sunday Times* editor John Witherow to woo glamorous war correspondent Christina Lamb from the *Sunday Telegraph*. Now, at long last, he has succeeded.

Torygraph editor Dominic Lawson reacted to the desertion in characteristic fashion – by sacking foreign editor Robin Gedye (*pour encourager les autres*) and then disappearing on holiday.

Since the paper can ill afford to pay off Gedye, a *Telegraph* veteran, executives must now find a new post for him. One idea is to offer him a berth as education editor, where his duties will no doubt include regular run-ins with department of education spin-doctor Chris Boffey – who, until a few months ago, was news editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*.

ONE of the few amusing features in the *New Statesman*, as often chronicled in the *Eye*, is the torrent of thinly disguised job applications in Amanda Platell's "media column".

Gissajob's piece two weeks ago included this classic of the genre: "Liars who court publicity can no longer take newspapers to the cleaners for printing the truth. Every journalist who cares about democracy and their role in it owes a debt of gratitude to Piers Morgan, the editor of the *Mirror*, for fighting what at times seemed an unwinnable battle in the courts."

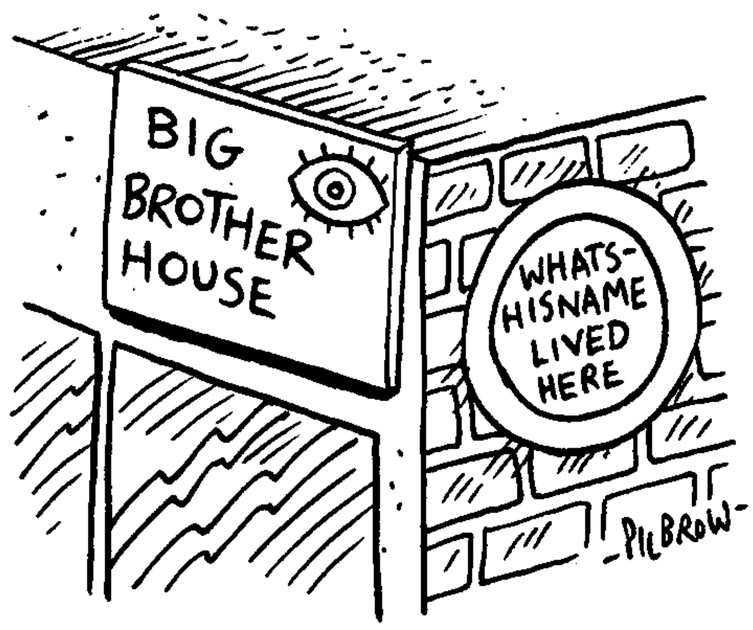
Can no one put the poor lass out of her misery by finding her a sinecure somewhere in the Street of Shame?

DES KELLY, deputy editor of the *Mirror* and consort of Ms Carol Vorderman, has shocking news for his readers.

"Someone knew good and early that [Howard] Wilkinson was to be named Sunderland boss and they used the information to line their pockets," he writes. "Why else did William Hill receive a late flurry of betting for Wilko on Wednesday afternoon, a run which caused them to slash the odds from 66-1 to 10-1? The same happened over at Ladbrokes, where Wilko went from 33-1 to 10-1 in a hour after some large bets were placed in the afternoon.

"It's called insider-dealing in any other business. So I wonder who cashed in?"

Who indeed would be so venal and dastardly? We look forward to an editorial from Kelly's boss, Piers "Viglen" Moron, demanding that Inspector Knacker investigate forthwith.



STAFF at the Express have often asked why, when they're being sacked and their jobs shunted up north to save money, their proprietor Richard Desmond continues to employ a liveried butler whose only job seems to be to deliver him an opened banana on a salver every morning at eleven.

It now appears, however, that the flunkey has another duty: he is sent to earwig on NUJ chapel meetings. The servile spy was spotted and thrown out of the meeting which voted unanimously to hold a strike ballot last Friday.

BALI BAD TASTE

HATS OFF to Richard Desmond's *OK!* magazine, which more than a week after the Bali bomb massacre devoted much of its 23 October edition to *Big Brother* nonentities Kate and Spencer and "pictures and interviews from their Bali hideaway".

Kate and Spencer had been sent there on a Dirty Des freebie and the "world exclusive" began thus:

Q: Did you enjoy Bali?

Kate: It was amazing. It was so exciting and really hot!

Not to be outdone the *Daily Mirror*'s glossy *M* supplement also carried a tasteful spread in its interiors section a week after the bomb: "Balinese Boudoir – How to transform your bedroom into a temple of gorgeousness."

JUST FANCY THAT!

"This is 19th century exploitation reborn in the 21st century media world, a scandal that all editors should strive to outlaw."

— Roy Greenslade, *Guardian*, 21 October, on the exploitation of wannabe journalists through the "work experience" system.

"The Editor is looking for student journalists and recent graduates who would like to spend two weeks undertaking work experience during the first six months of 2003... We will pay a weekly fee of £50 as a contribution to your expenses, but you will need to have somewhere to stay in the London area."

— Announcement in "The Editor" supplement, *Guardian*, 19 October.

CRYSTAL BALLS

THE resignation of education secretary Estelle Morris caught political correspondents on the hop. But when party chairman Charles Clarke was announced as her successor the next day, they all knew exactly what to say.

The *Mirror* claimed to have seen the promotion coming: "Political insiders were surprised when Mr Clarke failed to land a major department after Stephen Byers quit as transport secretary in May." Presumably these were different "insiders" to the ones who told the paper in August that Clarke "is now widely regarded as an embarrassment and a busted flush", causing the *Mirror* to predict his imminent replacement with that man of the moment, er, Robin Cook.

Over in the *Sun*, Trevor Kavanagh was fulsome in his praise. "If anyone can shake sense into our crazy education system, it should be Charles Clarke. The new secretary of state has the political clout, the Whitehall experience and the trust of the prime minister." All attributes the paper overlooked in June when they denounced him as a "self-pitying whinger" with a habit of "talking self-serving bilge".

The *Independent* underwent a similar conversion, moving from calling Clarke "inept to the point of incompetence" in June to "a lifelong and exceptionally articulate politico" last week. Meanwhile the *Telegraph* praised "a supremely confident bruiser of a politician who can hack it with the modern media... no one doubts his political ability." Apart, perhaps, from the *Telegraph*, which in June denounced his "paranoid attitude to the press".

The *Mail* had refined its considered view of Clarke from a "fat, claret-swigging Labour party chairman" with "a belly the size of an airship" to "a clever, confident politician", who was being "tipped as a future Labour leader". And the *Express*, which in June had revealed Clarke was "known as 'the gaffer' by some Labour MPs because of his tendency to attract difficult headlines" had now decided he was one of the cabinet's most "confident media performers".

So what happened in June? Charles Clarke claimed that the British press was "pious and hypocritical", indulging in "manufactured criticism" of politicians for its own ends. As the paper's magnanimous change of opinion last week shows, nothing could be further from the truth.

Number crunching

£6 million

- reduction in wage bill of Express newspapers due to staff redundancies in last year
- salary of Express newspaper boss Richard Desmond for last year

HOT-BLOODED MAIL

A POSSE of freeloading hacks including Peter McKay of the *Daily Mail* recently enjoyed a week's jaunt to Jamaica.

Unlike his fellow-travellers, however, McHackey decided not to return at the end of the holiday (sorry, fact-finding trip). He rang to inform the underlings on his Ephraim Hardcastle column that he would be extending his Caribbean idyll for another week. He then dictated a paragraph shamelessly plugging the luxurious Royal Plantation Hotel, Ocho Rios – whose owner, Gordon "Butch" Stewart, had paid for the freebie.

The *Mail*'s editor Paul Dacre was none too pleased by this back-scratching. But he also became extremely anxious to know why McHackey had decided to stay on.

Dacre's concern was understandable, especially at a time when the *Mail*'s line on marital propriety has become more severe than ever. For as soon as the other hacks had departed, the incorrigible McFuckey met an incoming flight bearing one Tashi Lassalle, the lovely twentysomething headhunter, who he has been "mentoring" under a cloudless Caribbean sky.

Jamaica? No, she came of her own accord.

PS: Several young women "came forward" last week to tell the *Daily Mail* of their own experiences with TV presenter John Leslie. One said that Leslie cooked dinner for her and then offered a guided tour of his home – only to start "kissing and fumbling" when they reached the bedroom. She was "shocked and angry that he had tried to take advantage of me", since she had "never given him any indication that I was interested or available in any way". There was also much talk of drunken parties and sudden disrobing.

These stories were duly reported by *Mail* hack Geoffrey Levy with much indignant tut-tutting about the crude courting techniques of the younger generation. As a colleague of McKay, however, Levy should know that age has nothing to do with it. To *Eye* readers, his tale will be eerily reminiscent of the occasion when McHackey and other drunken denizens of Shame-strasse went round to the flat of hackette Kate Sissons for dinner. After the guests had left, thinking she was alone, Sissons retired to her bedroom – only to find McHackey in a state of extreme undress, bouncing up and down on the bed and shouting "Are you readie for me, lassie?"

PPS: Returning from his Jamaican sojourn, McHackey writes a thoughtful column in Monday's *Mail*.

"It isn't good manners for men to paw or proposition women in public, but both sexes accept it when it suits them," he observes. "Neither is it common sense to go back to a man's room and remove your clothes without the danger that this might be understood, but plenty do that too."

Just so. As McHackey sagely concludes: "Sex has always been a hazardous game – for men as well as women. Some never really get started. Others can't wait for age to quell their urges. Only battle-scarred masochists regard it as a worthwhile lifelong pursuit."

McKay is, of course, referring to the Ulrika Jonsson saga.

The new etiquette

Miss B: The 29-year-old personal assistant claimed Leslie tried to put his hand up her skirt at a showbusiness dinner. "I had never met him before and he was extremely drunk," she said.

"Within seconds his hand was up my dress under the table. I could not believe it – the bread rolls hadn't even arrived.

Daily Express

HACKWATCH

Tina Brown

TWO months ago the new *Times* editor Robert Thomson announced a sensational *coup*. In return for a vast cheque, he had persuaded Tina Brown – former editor of *Vanity Fair*, the *New Yorker* and *Talk* magazine – to write a weekly column.

"Tina Resurfaces in London *Times*", an awestruck headline in the New York *Daily News* declared. In an interview with *Press Gazette*, Thomson described Brown as "just about the best-connected person in the world" and promised that the column would be "typically and uniquely Tina, who has always been the alchemist of buzz".

Could she live up to the billing? Here's the story so far…

3 October: Tina starts as she means to go on: "At lunch with Steve Florio, the president of US Conde Nast, in the Grill Room of the Four Seasons restaurant just off Park Avenue, I contemplate the dwindling band of CEOs still able to get a table." A perfect cue for reminiscing about other megastar companions. "It was here in this minimalist power chamber that last December I lunched in a booth with Dr Sam Waksal, the strenuously charming chairman of ImClone Systems Inc…" *In a booth!* But there's more: "Here I waved at Martha Stewart, the domestic goddess… Here I tried to sweet-talk the financier Ken Lipper… Here I saw the winged heels of Jack Welch when he was still the untrammelled god of General Electric…"

But that's enough history. Who's lunching today? "At the next table are a couple of real survivors: Barry Diller, the reigning daddy cool of American business, and Ron Meyer, the president of Universal Entertainment." In case we don't know, she tells us that Meyer was for 20 years the business partner of "Michael Ovitz, aka The Most Powerful Man in Hollywood". And who's this figure wandering up to the Diller-Meyer table? Why, Jerry Levin, "once king of the world as CEO of the Time-Warner behemoth", whom Tina hasn't seen since a lunch at the Museum of Modern Art last spring. Which reminds her, though she doesn't say why, of "a dinner party in our garden in New York last summer, when Martha Stewart…" Enough already!

10 October: Disturbing signs of indigestion. This week's column begins with Tina attending a fund-raising breakfast "as the guest of the Republican hostess Georgette Mosbacher. The governor of New York, George Pataki, is the main attraction." Alas, it's all a bit dull. Tina then attends a launch for Rudy Giuliani's book *Leadership* – a good excuse to remind us that a couple of years ago "I went to city hall with Harvey Weinstein, the chairman of Miramax Films, to help reel in this book for our publishing company Talk Miramax". Alas, Rudy too seems rather dull now. There's even a certain lassitude at "the gym on 57th Street which used to be a hotbed of displaced executive sexual energy" – a gym which, Tina reveals, she has visited at 5.45 am every morning for the past 15 years. Is it any wonder she feels a little worn out?

17 October: "Editing glossy magazines, as I did at *Vanity Fair* and *Talk*, puts you in the free-fire zone between celebrity insecurity and the intrepid curiosity of whichever trivia cop you have set on the sacred monster." What can it mean? Hard to say, but it's a useful prompt to remind us that Tina knows a few celebs herself. In 1991 Jackie Onassis attended a party "hosted by my husband and me for her old friend, the Washington eminence Clark Clifford. She was impeccably charming". Better still, "half way through dinner the Camelot historian Arthur Schlesinger made admiring reference to a piece we had just published on Margaret Thatcher, and urged another guest to read it". No wonder today's *Times* column has a new picture byline of Tina, grinning fit to bust.

24 October: Eminences? Tina's gottem! She attends a "luncheon at the Waldorf" for the legendary veteran journalist Mary McGrory, who "still has spectacular balls". Then on to the legendary historian Arthur Schlesinger's 85th birthday party: "Edna O'Brien flew in from London to make a winsome toast… Kitty Carlisle Hart, who was married to Moss Hart and is still out every night in her crenellated black-lacquer coiffe, led the guests in song." And then to "yet another awards fest" with legendary mogul David Rockefeller, and thence to a book launch for "debonair Washington wag Christopher Buckley", where the fellow-guests include legendary socialite Nan Kempner and the legendary mass-murderer Henry Kissinger, a dear friend of Tina's. "We seem to have been following each other around in the rain all week to black-tie dinners. 'Three more events tonight,' Kissinger said, waving as he sprang into a waiting limousine outside the Schlesinger thrash." Henry, Tina reckons, is "feeling unusually *echt*".

The "alchemist of buzz", eh? After a mere four pieces, Tina has certainly confirmed her "best-connected person" status. But how many weary *Times* readers are already wishing the great alchemist would just buzz off?

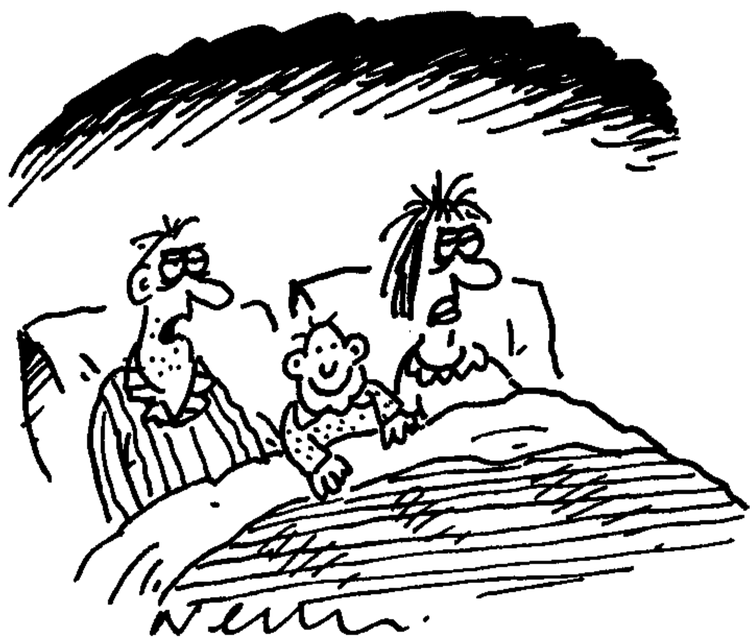
ANDREW "Brillo Pad" Neill has issued a thunderous rebuke to Barclay Knapp, boss of cable TV company NTL, for accepting a pay rise which takes his salary to £500,000 despite having driven NTL into the ground.

"I'm all in favour of generous remuneration for managers, provided it's linked to performance," Brillo declares in his new *Evening Standard* media column. "The Knapp pay-packet seems perversely linked to non-performance. If he's worth all that for bankrupting NTL, what on earth would they be paying him if he'd made it a success?"

One can only hope this sage advice isn't drawn to the attention of the Barclay twins, who hired Brillo seven years ago (on a salary of, er, £500,000) to run their newspapers. One, the *European*, sank with all hands following a hugely expensive Brillo-inspired relaunch. Another, *Sunday Business*, lost a fortune before being rebranded as *The Business*, a paper read by about three people and a dog.

And what of the flagship titles, the *Scotsman* and *Scotland on Sunday*? Brillo's ingenious scheme to turn these once-great newspapers into trashy anti-Scottish rags destroyed their reputation, forced out all the best hacks and alienated the readers. He also wasted millions on a cut-price sales campaign which then had to be abandoned. Three months ago, 130 journalists on both titles passed a unanimous vote of no-confidence in Neill and called for him to resign.

The *Scotsman*'s circulation has fallen from 93,000 to 76,000 during the past year. As a firm believer in success-related pay, will Brillo now ask the Barclays for a massive cut in his own salary?



"I have this fantasy which doesn't include three-in-a-bed"

IN THE TEAROOM

SO WHO'S afraid of Charles Clarke? Much has been made during the past week of the supposedly pugnacious qualities of the new education secretary. But just as avoirdupois isn't the same thing as gravitas, a generously developed wine-belly isn't the same as real political muscle.

Besides, the teachers' unions can take heart from the fact that Clarke not only has no stomach for the kind of fight needed to rescue the country's educational institutions from what the pointyheads in Downing Street call "producer capture" – it isn't in his longer term interests to even try.

Although, as chief sidekick to Neil Kinnock, Clarke can claim to be a first generation "moderniser" in the sense of wanting to make Labour electable, he isn't temperamentally or imaginatively a "new" labour sort at all. Clarke is the son of a Whitehall mandarin with a knighthood. In a still prolier-than-thou party, this can be something of a social disadvantage. Others like him compensate by affecting an interest in football, but Clarke's way of mimicking authentic working class manners is to come over all chippy and just a touch threatening.

The same insecurity leads him to hint that he's really more "old" labour than he's behaved until now. That means he will resist all the exciting education reforms that Number 10 policy whizz Andrew Adonis has spent the last year persuading the PM are needed if schools and universities are going to deliver.

This all makes Clarke an attractive leadership candidate for those who dread Gordon Brown succeeding and who know that the Blairite true believers haven't really got a convincing candidate. Accordingly, a small fan club is beginning to get behind their man. Labour's party chairman David Triesman is number one chum, and is now joined by his own acolyte, the party's new "head of attack" Andrew Pakes. Pakes (like Clarke) was once national union of students president. Often described as "openly gay" he can, when the mood takes him, also be "openly straight". Indeed, he launched his campaign for the NUS presidency by denouncing university gay socs for discriminating against bisexuals.

Okay... Triesman and Pakes hardly constitute a powerbase for a leadership bid, I know... and yes, the smart money's still on Peter Hain. But as Edwina Currie has recently vouchsafed, even the most unlikely politician can nurse a genuine leadership ambition... and that alone is enough to cause trouble.

'Urquhart'

Number crunching

41% (or £47,000)

■ pay increase for Tony Blair after the last election

40% (or £9,000)

■ pay claim by firefighters, described by Tony Blair as 'Scargillite'

HAVING replaced one alleged bruiser – Charles "Fatty" Clarke – with another – John "Gorbals" Reid – as Labour party chairman, Tony Blair may soon find relations with the unions deteriorating even further.

Reid delights in bashing heads together, although as a former Marxist he delights "colleagues" by addressing them as "comrade". Not that this will impress the brothers and sisters who now hold the trump hand – or rather the cheque book. Gorbals will have to be very comradely to them before they start writing out any cheques payable to "The Labour Party".

GORDON BROWN denies that the private finance initiative (PFI) is privatisation by another name. But the treasury's latest appointment suggests otherwise.

In November James Sassoon, currently vice-chairman of investment banking at UBS Warburg, becomes a managing director at the treasury in charge of PFI. In 1999 Sassoon described his job at Warburgs to MPs saying: "I head the Warburg privatisation team."

Sassoon was addressing the public accounts committee having been summoned to justify his role advising on the worst privatisation to date: the Tories' sale of Railtrack. The national audit office (NAO) revealed that Warburg not only advised the government on the sale but also made fees flogging the shares: a clear conflict of interest.

A low price for Railtrack shares made for an easier sale, cheating the exchequer but doing nothing to reduce the investment bank's huge commissions. As Labour MP Geraint Davies pointed out to Sassoon, Warburg had negotiated surprisingly high rates of commission on the sale. He described Sassoon's work for Warburg as "ripping off the taxpayer and at the same time administering a sales loss to the taxpayer of millions of pounds".

A treasury spokesman told the *Eye* that having a senior banker on hand to help with PFIs, productivity and pensions was "very helpful". The treasury was unable though to confirm whether Sassoon was involved in another major privatisation rip-off, the Channel tunnel rail link. Warburg was both an adviser to and major investor in London & Continental Railways, the firm that owns the rail link. It was bailed out by the government when it looked like going bust, leaving the taxpayer with millions of pounds of uncontrolled liabilities. The treasury did acknowledge Sassoon's involvement in other major privatisations like BT and Powergen, however.

THE infuriating and time-wasting habit of NHS GPs spending time with their patients and then sending them on for further care to hospital has stung the government into a new privatisation initiative.

Spin doctors to Alan Milburn, health secretary, have let it be known that the government is on the verge of an agreement with the privately-owned UnitedHealth group of America under which the company's experts will be allowed into GPs' surgeries to help change the way they treat patients. UnitedHealth specialises in "treatment models" that keep patients out of hospital and encourage them instead to "take greater responsibility for their own care" (ie: go home and shut up).

PS: In 1988 one of the group's companies, UnitedHealthCare, incorporated its own "pharmacy benefits management company", Diversified Pharmaceutical Services Inc, which six years later was sold to the British drugs giant SmithKline Beecham.

PPS: UnitedHealthCare finances are in reliable hands. The chief financial officer, Patrick J. Erlandson, is a former partner of Arthur Andersen. The senior vice president, L. Robert Dapper, is a former top executive at Arthur Andersen, and the chief executive officer, James Hudak, was once global management partner of Andersen Consulting, now Accenture.

Advertisement, Viz

AS HE prepares for a second attempt at the London mayoralty, Steve "Shagger" Norris is also seeking election to the Savile club. His proposer is an old Labour stalwart, former deputy GLC leader Illtyd Harrington.

Asked by a puzzled member why he would support the application of a Tory such as Norris, Harrington replied, "Well, it would be good to have a real left winger in here."

THE attempt by IDS (the initials stand for "In Deep Shit" according to disillusioned Tory back-benchers) to rebrand the Conservatives as the never nasty party, has resulted in a major row inside central office about the party's name.

The Tories' "chief executive", PR man Mark MacGregor, who has almost total control of central office following the demise of strategist Dominic Cummings, has had a brilliant idea: the Conservative party should be renamed – wait for it – "The Enterprise Party".

Labour effectively became a new party with a new name in 1994, he argues, so why shouldn't the Tories pull off a similar stunt? All he has to do now is persuade Mr Cough himself and Ms Kitten, aka Tory chairman Theresa May.

MacGregor may now pass as a Tory "moderniser", but his past as a crazed and fervent libertarian is worrying old hands. In the 1980s he was chairman of the Federation of Conservative Students (FCS) which was so wackily right-wing that it was closed down by the then party chairman Norman Tebbit.

MacGregor was elected at the notorious FCS conference which trashed Loughborough University. "Wets" were terrorised, excrement was left in a shower and drunken activists sang favourites from the FCS songbook such as "We Don't Want no Coons or Asians" (to the tune of Pink Floyd's "Another brick in the wall"), "Singing Thatcher, Reagan, Botha, Pinochet" ("She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain") and that all-time Nazi youth favourite "Tomorrow Belongs To Me".

UNUSUAL scenes at the Gay Hussar restaurant on 14 October, when the great and good of the political world congregated to inspect the drawings of cartoonist Martin Rowson.

Gordon Brown's former spin doctor Charlie Whelan turned up in his kilt to remind guests of his public relations work for Scottish football. Unfortunately, in a fit of fatigue and emotion, Whelan lifted the front of his kilt to display whatever he keeps under it to the wife of burly Labour MP for West Bromwich East, Tom Watson.

Watson was not impressed and moved menacingly towards Whelan, uttering grim threats. Fortunately for the peace of the occasion (and the health of the not very mighty Whelan) the MP was restrained in time.

CURSE OF LABOUR

AS revealed in the last *Eye*, energy minister Brian Wilson spoke at the Labour party conference on a platform sponsored by TXU.

Within two weeks the firm had announced it was closing its British operation to solve financial difficulties.

THE muted response from Labour MPs to home secretary David Blunkett's decision to resurrect discredited Tory ploys to drive out asylum seekers by rendering them destitute, may be because they were completely misled about the proposals by the party machine.

A briefing paper to MPs said that the decision to deny benefits to all who do not claim asylum the moment they land on UK soil would be taken by trained and experienced immigration and nationality (IND) staff – ie the same ones who decide asylum claims. Further, there would be a quick right of appeal, usually within days, to asylum support adjudicators.

But this was wrong on both counts. Home office minister Lord Filkin revealed in the Lords that the fate of the asylum seekers is in the hands of the pisspoor National Asylum Support Service (NASS), whose staff have no experience of assessing the credibility or otherwise of a claim for asylum. NAFF has also been widely condemned for administrative inefficiency and incompetence. Even Blunkett's own adviser, Professor Bernard Crick, recently condemned it as "hastily created" and "failing the vulnerable refugees it was created to help".

Even more outrageous is that if the home secretary has his way, there will be no right of appeal against NAFF decisions to the asylum support adjudicators or anyone else.

'Backbiter'

In The Courts

THE case of David Shayler, who is charged with three offences under the official secrets act, continues in conditions of exceptional secrecy.

After a flurry of publicity on the day the case opened, reporting restrictions were imposed. The key question seems to be whether or not Mr Shayler, who has been at large for five years and is representing himself, is such a threat to national security that the whole case should be heard in secret.

The judge is Mr Justice Moses; and this is not the first time he has dealt with cases involving national security. In 1992, when Alan Moses was a mere QC, he was leading prosecuting counsel in the notorious Matrix Churchill case in which the intelligence services, MI5 and MI6 submitted public interest immunity certificates (PIICs) to stop the three defendants demonstrating government involvement in their crimes.

Geoffrey Robertson QC, for the defence, protested bitterly that he and his client should be allowed to see the incriminating documents. Alan Moses QC just as bitterly protested that the documents should be kept secret. Fortunately for the defendants, Mr Justice Smedley ordered that some of the documents should be disclosed. They showed that the government had effectively sanctioned precisely the sort of exports for which they were now seeking to imprison the defendants. The case collapsed and the defendants walked free.

ESTELLE QUITS

FOLLOWING the "setbacks" that have seen moderate union leaders replaced by left-wingers in the train drivers' union Aslef (Mick Rix), Amicus (Derek Simpson) and RMT (Bob "Fred Kite" Crow), Downing Street is hoping the trend will change in Britain's fourth largest union, the GMB.

In recent years the GMB's pugilistic general-secretary John Edmonds has emerged as one of "new" Labour's sternest and most feared critics. He has earned his spurs among comrades for the vehemence and frequency of the anti-Edmonds briefings emerging from "sources close to" Downing Street. Edmonds has cut his union's donations to the party and his vigorous campaigning and expensive advertising campaign against the government's private finance initiative policy has bought his union new members.

Hence the Blairistas are already counting the days to the 2003 contest that will see Edmonds replaced – they hope – by the union's powerful northern region boss, Kevin Curran. Curran has powerful "friends from the North", including the GMB-backed former agriculture minister Nick Brown and former northern region official turned local MP, Kevan Jones.

Curran was the only union chief to be singled out for indirect praise by the prime minister in his speech to the TUC earlier this autumn. Not only has Curran helped ensure new working practices on the Tyne's remaining shipyards, but his region's criticism of the government's creeping privatisation of public services has been more muted than that of competitor union, Unison.

But the battle for the £86,000-a-year general-secretary's job has hardly begun. The other union heavyweight to throw his hat into the ring is the left-wing London regional secretary Paul Kenny. Kenny would fit happily into the new family of left-wing government critics; but Curran is having some success persuading the brothers and sisters that *he* is the left's candidate. So it's unlikely any further praise from Blair for Curran will be welcome – until, of course, the contest is over.

'Blackleg'

FURTHER EDUCATION

HIGHER education minister Margaret Hodge indicated the government's thinking on student fees when Richard Sykes was appointed to the board of the higher education funding council, the body which controls university cash.

Sykes, the former boss of Glaxo, is now rector of London's Imperial College. Within three days of his appointment to the funding council on 15 October, a leaked plan revealed how he thinks universities should be funded. Sykes proposed charging Imperial students fees of £10,500 a year.

At the same time as appointing Sykes, Hodge put Nigel Savage, chief executive of the College of Law, on to the funding council board. The college is a private institution which receives no money from the funding council and relies entirely on fees from students who pay between £5,575 and £8,800 a year for legal courses.

As Savage told the *Times Higher Educational Supplement*: "Personally I am in favour of differential and full-cost fees."

MORE on the *Eye*'s old chum Dr Terry Ashurst who has been appointed interim principal of Rother Valley College in Dinnington, South Yorkshire.

The further education college is just a few miles south of Doncaster College, where Ashurst installed his wife Nina as clerk to the governors and head of personnel. As such she was the person to whom the many members of staff who were sacked by Ashurst had to appeal.

Sociology lecturer John Giddins was one such – Terry sacked him in 1997 for refusing to sign a contract that obliged him to work more hours for less money. Giddins won his case for unfair dismissal, after a tribunal which exposed that Nina Ashurst was unqualified to do her job and had never been interviewed for it.

Ashurst's other lasting legacy in Doncaster was the £1m conference centre, which was set up at a time when the college was running a £1.3m surplus and cutting lecturing staff by 10 percent. The centre was run by Waterdale Training Enterprises, of which Terry Ashurst was a director.

The learning and skills council required Rother Valley's last principal to stand down due to poor performance at the college. It's certainly found the right man to turn things around!

GRAYS school of art, part of the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, didn't do frightfully well in recent evaluation of its research projects, and this meant a drop in its research income.

Four of the able research team, despite admirable records, did not have their long-term contracts extended or renewed for this term. But as the college explained, there is all the difference in the world between long- and short-term contracts.

Hence there was no reason to end the short-term contracts of some of the teaching staff, who include Valerie Diggle, wife of Prof Jeremy Diggle, the school's principal, and Victoria Smith, partner of Ken Neil, fine art course leader.

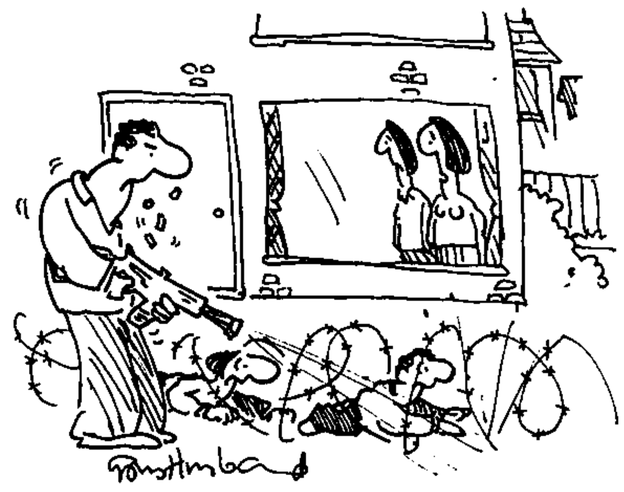
THE *Eye*'s favourite exam cheat, Elizabeth Hall, has added a new string to her bow.

Last year we reported how Hall, an ex-lecturer at the University of Central England, was offering an "academic rescue" service via the internet, which she happily admitted meant she wrote other people's work for cash (see *Eye* 1043).

Hall's services do not come cheap, however – BA coursework will set students back £40 an hour, beyond the means of most full-time students. So she has branched out into the even more lucrative area of business qualifications.

"The MBA [Master of Business Administration] is now the most sought after accreditation for progression in business and local government," she writes on her website, elizabethhall.co.uk. "The problem is, have you the time to complete one?" Much easier to let Ms Hall and her cronies do it for you. "We can provide you with tutorial support and the writing of academic papers to make sure your investment is safe."

Elsewhere on the site, Ms Hall is breezily dismissive of the £500,000 worth of technology the government has introduced to root out cheats like her. Her system "CANNOT be detected by using the plagiarism detection facility due to be launched in UK universities next semester." Treble-firsts all round!



"Ralph's preparing them for their new secondary school, apparently it's quite rough"

TV

Great Britons – The Top 100 (BBC2)
Great Britons – Brunel (BBC2)
Great Britons Collection (BBC2)

THE current jargon of choice for ambitious BBC executives is "ticking boxes". The phrase refers to the measurement of shows against the BBC's list of ambitions for its programmes at the moment.

Thus, a BBC Scotland documentary about a black poet who writes an epic poem with the final couplet left blank for the audience to complete might be said to "have ticked a lot of boxes": ie, the BBC is seen in such a piece to be fulfilling recent promises of regional output, arts coverage, racial representation, and inter-active content.

Great Britons – BBC2's vast project to decide the highest UK achievers of all time – exists because it ticks more boxes than a census compiler. It's a history series, a genre the corporation has pledged to expand after the success of Simon Schama's shows. Its focus is British, which helps because the governors keep getting grumpy about the amount of American programming on the channels. It involves the public in the editorial decisions, which fulfils the 21st century shibboleths of "access" and "democratisation". And it also seeks to extend the "reach" of BBC2: another piece of jargon which refers to the attempt to bring to a channel viewers who would not usually tune in.

Finally, *Great Britons* is an even more thrillingly perfect example of ticked-box TV because it literally asks the public to put their mark against a list of squares. Viewers and online users of the BBC were asked to vote for the 100 most significant Britons in history. Documentaries were then commissioned about the top ten leading to a further national vote for the number one slot.

This approach is all very modern and admirable. In the past, a cabal of history and arts graduates would have sat in an office in White City and made a top-down, patriarchal judgement of the chaps from these isles who really mattered. But the problem with the bottom-up, inclusive editorial process is that the electorate feels no obligation to take a historical overview. The choices are made by people with short memories riding hobby horses.

So in the Top 100 J.K. Rowling is included, while Milton, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Shelley and so on all go hang. David Beckham gets the No 33 shirt but W.G. Grace gets no place in the order. Amazingly, a contemporary broadcaster – John Peel – makes Number 43 ahead of John Logie Baird at 44, while another John who was also important to the medium – Reith – is ignored entirely. The Hobbit-obsessives have got in Tolkein, while sentimental lefties account for the presence of Tony Benn, though Clement Atlee misses the cut.

At least the Top Ten, with the exception of the inevitable touchy-feely vote for Diana, is fairly sensible: Churchill, Shakespeare, Elizabeth I and so on. But, while that might be an acceptable set to read about in a newspaper poll, it's depressing in this venture because it means yet another documentary about people who are scarcely ever off the bloody box (cf Schama on Churchill; Starkey on Elizabeth). A project touted as original becomes horribly conventional in this central element.

Another botch is that the decision to invite votes from viewers on the ten means that the presenters become campaigners, concentrating only on the good points about their subjects, which makes the programmes useless as history. In fact, the model for the early documentaries seemed to be those old Blue Peter primers on great figures from the past.

It's true that, after the monstrosity of Jeremy Clarkson's pitch for **Brunel** – full of his usual mugging for the cameras and "I kid you not!"-type Rotary Club vocab – the presenters aren't a bad bunch. Although someone needs to strap his hands together, Millbank Marr does a good job on Darwin and Rosie Boycott does more than just lay flowers before Diana.

Some proper historians are even promised later: Richard Holmes on Cromwell and Lucy Moore on Nelson, though admittedly the essays in the official series-accompanying book sound a loud luvvie-alert about Fiona Shaw's take on Shakespeare who apparently "reminds us that language is physical and sexy and muscular, and that it empowers both speaker and listener". Comedian Alan Davies on John Lennon may also be a good night to be out.

Some of those names – Clarkson, Davies – reveal the real problem with the series, which is that it wants to have something for every possible type of viewer: ticking every box, if you like. While some of the films are serious, the series-opener – **Great Britons - The Top 100** – was a tacky jamboree hosted by Anne Robinson, who by reading a few answers off cards on *The Weakest Link* seems somehow to have been credited by the BBC as an intellectual.

The most dangerous decision, though, is to run late at night on the same day as the main documentaries a series called the **Great Britons Collection**, which consists of repeats of old BBC programmes related to the subjects: a *One Foot In the Past* on Brunel, a David Attenborough doc on Darwin and so on. The problem is that the re-runs are frequently going to be more serious and thoughtful than the films they follow. This hostage to critics and nostalgics may not rank in the BBC's Top 100 Great Ideas.

'Remote -Controller'

Blame Academy

MEDIA NEWS

SEVERAL recent productions from Rupert Murdoch's Fox Corporation have been eerily prescient.

Last year, in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks, Fox's TV terrorism hit *24* made a hasty retreat to the cutting room to remove a scene depicting an exploding passenger aircraft. Last week, one year on and with the US in the grip of sniper fever, Fox was forced to pull a series of online pop-up ads for the new series of *24*, which featured a sniper's sights roving across the screen.

In a forthcoming Kiefer Sutherland film *Phone Booth*, also produced by 20th Century Fox and now also put back, Sutherland plays a sniper who nails a random target, in a phone booth. Do Fox scriptwriters know something we don't?

CNN's key political debate show *Crossfire* goes out nightly on the network, and is heavily trailed on the network's breaking news website.

It wasn't until 20 days, and 13 deaths, into the Washington sniper crisis that someone noticed that advertising the show, complete with its logo of cross-hair rifle sights, alongside their daily reports was perhaps tasteless and removed it.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

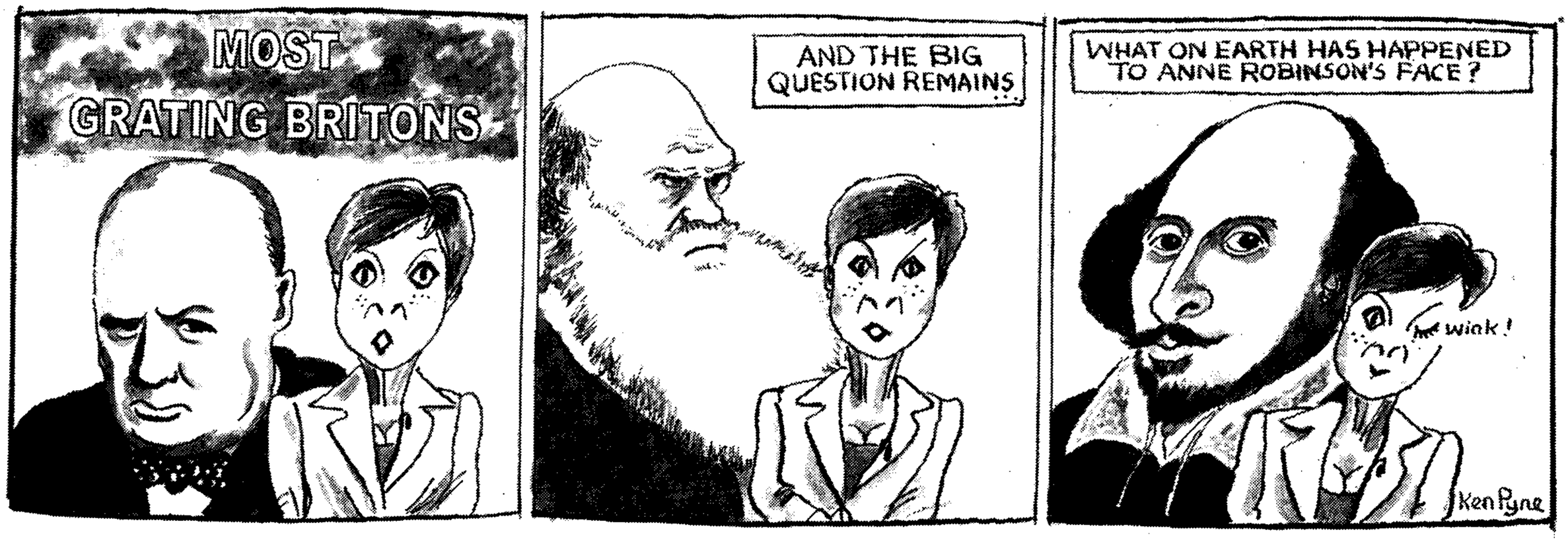
Anne Robinson: Which Shakespeare play contains the lines "Double, double toil and trouble, fire burn and cauldron bubble"?
Contestant: *The Witches of Eastwick.*
AR: What religion was founded by the prophet Mohammed in AD 610?
Contestant: Rastafarianism.

Family Fortunes, ITV

Andy Collins: Name something Old Macdonald had on his farm.
Contestant: Giraffe.

Judgemental, BBC1

Sophie Raworth: The category, birds. When a person has no hair, they are said to be as bald as a... what?
Contestant: Chicken.



"PRODUCER Choice was the single most decisive change for the better during my time in the BBC." So begins one of the more boring chapters of John Birt's memoirs.

Few would agree with the former BBC director-general's assessment of this particular reform. But then few agree with much of what he has written about his career.

As for Birt's view of Producer Choice, the figures show that the BBC was spending £300m on overheads in 1993… and after 10 years of Birtism, £500m!

"TALKING to Asians everywhere" is the optimistic brief for the Asian Network, a national digital radio service just launched by the BBC.

It's aimed at a British Asian male, "aged 27, who earns about 35k as a Nike consultant", a spectacularly tiny audience and one which already has access to the Midlands-based BBC network of the same name via the internet and digital TV.

The new network won't be cheap. It will be a "three centre operation" and employ 100 staff, 64 full time, including news and entertainment producers and a whole sports unit in Leicester – another example of pointless digital overspend.

APPLICATIONS are invited for journalists to work on BBC Three's news bulletins, containing "the main national, international, sports and entertainment news of the day".

Given that the Beeb's Freeview digital package already includes BBC News 24 and will soon include Sky News too, isn't this yet *another* example of pointless digital overspend?

***FAME Academy*, one of the BBC's most expensive shows ever, is also one of its biggest disasters.**

The so-called talent show attracted fewer than 5m viewers at its launch (now down to 3m and counting); and its producers, the *Big Brother* people at Endemol, are desperately trying to have it rescheduled so it no longer has to compete with the downmarket soap *Emmerdale*, placed alongside it by a canny ITV.

Meanwhile the PR drive to save the show is equally desperate. There are almost constant trails (the more a show is trailed, the direr straits it's in) and young viewers of the Beeb's children's channel, CBBC, are being bombarded with a twice-daily weekday tie-in.

Despite the push for young viewers, insiders believe the producers will have to, er, "produce" a "raunchy" romance between a couple of the contestants to save the day. Stand by for a stomach-turning snogfest.

WHAT do you do when two of your most costly ventures are heading down the pan? At Channel 4 you use them to prop each other up.

When its satellite racing channel attheraces was launched earlier this year, the station confidently promised that 380,000 viewers would take advantage of its interactive betting element. But it didn't work on the opening day and only around 60,000 punters are bothering to tune in.

Around the same number will have watched Channel 4's similarly dyslexic breakfast show *RI:SE*, which devoted the bulk of its 7:20am sports bulletin on Monday to a lengthy "interview" with attheraces presenter Mike Cattermole. "Thanks Mike, it sounds like a great show," concluded *RI:SE* presenter Kirsty Gallacher – probably not a phrase her own production team are familiar with.

THE NEOPHILIACS

An occasional series on the desperate quest for "the new new"...

"WAX TO THE MAX. Is a topiaried pubic area the new pashmina?"

— Fashion feature in the *Times*.

AD NAUSEAM

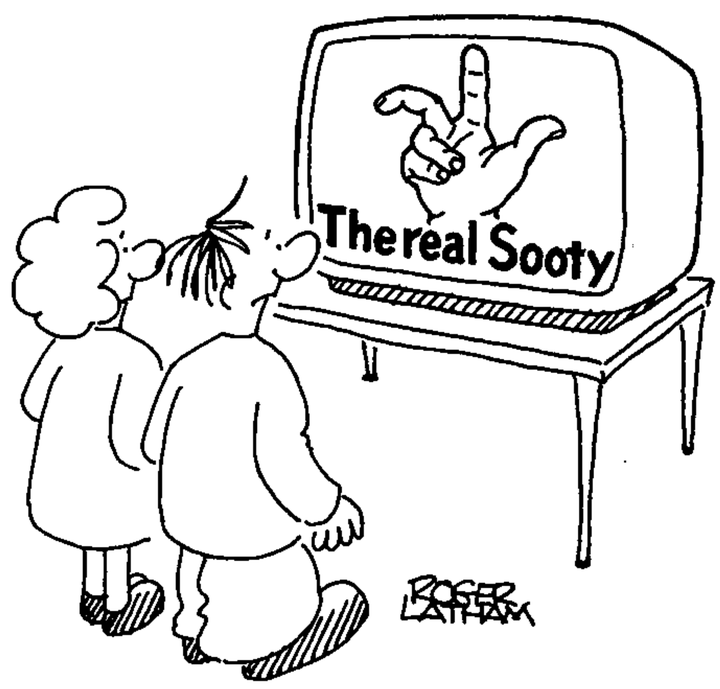
AT LEAST a decade after it was first mooted and five years after Labour made it a mainstay of their election manifesto, tobacco advertising is finally set to be banned.

Last Tuesday the tobacco advertising and promotion bill received a third unopposed reading and should become law by the end of the year. Not just posters and press, but sponsorship, direct marketing, and so-called "brand stretching" (branded clothing and the like) will all be off-limits.

From an advertising point of view that means a good six months or so of brainstorming to come up with ways to outfox the legislation. It was, after all, the first raft of anti-tobacco regulations in the 70s that led to tobacco advertising's golden age, with agency CDP producing the cryptic "gold" work for Benson & Hedges that has become a watchword for sophistication and ingenuity within the industry.

There is more than enough foggy semantics in the current bill for wily lawyers and skilful creatives to get their teeth into. Geoffrey Couchman, sales director at Imperial Tobacco, has even said that the term "promotion… is not clearly defined", which is a fairly serious oversight in a bill entitled "tobacco advertising and promotion."

On the subject of other potential loopholes the tobacco companies are keeping schtum –



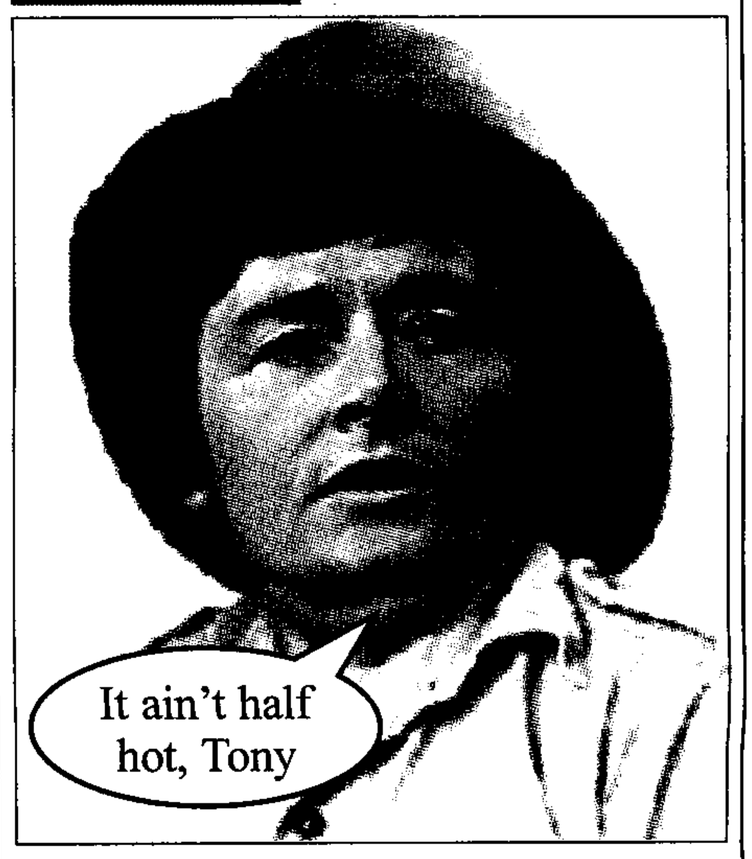
understandably, given the law has not yet been finalised and they don't want to raise the alarm. But look out for specialist "lifestyle" tobacconists, run like coffee shops by cigarette brands to gain shop frontage: BAT has a tester up and running in Amsterdam already. Or "incentivised purchase" – a neat twist on the now-illegal giveaways where a product will be sold with a pack of cigarettes for what the bill calls "a reasonable price". What constitutes "reasonable" remains undisclosed. Holidaymakers are also seen as easy pickings by the tobacco companies.

For an idea of the acuity of the minds at work, one only need look at an open letter from the World Health Organisation to the tobacco companies, published the day after the bill was passed in the Commons. The WHO criticised the tobacco companies for, incredibly, a Youth Smoking Prevention campaign that the cigarette manufacturers had funded, saying that "these campaigns have no effect. In some cases they may actually encourage young people to smoke." If tobacco companies can promote smoking even while purporting to condemn it, rest assured tobacco will still be advertised. You just may not realise it.

PS: TBWA, Labour's advertising agency of choice, is also the agency for Marlboro.

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



Don Estelle Morris

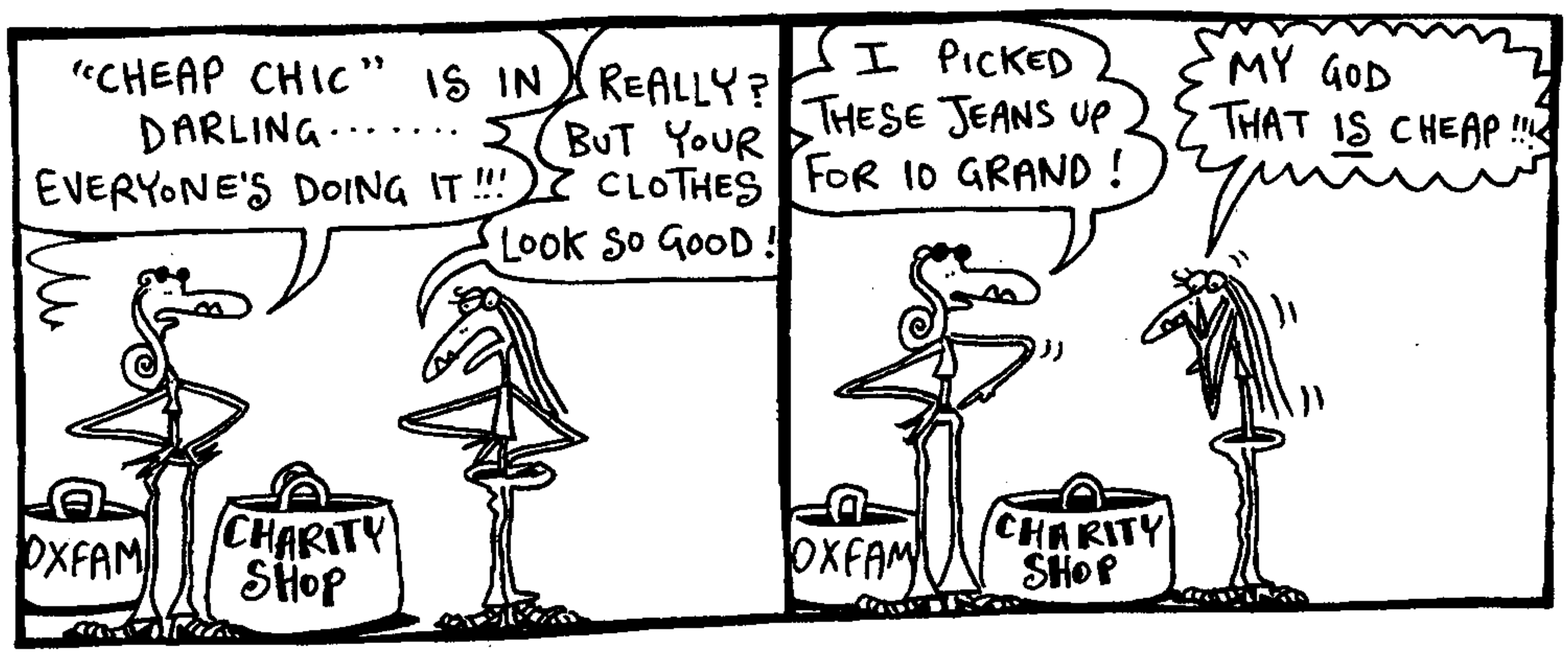
MUCH mirth at the Pot Noodle PR department after its coup in the *Sun* a few weeks ago.

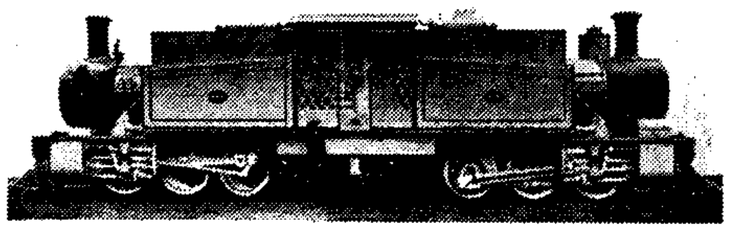
It placed a story that Pot Noodle was launching an Edwina Currie tikka masala flavour, to cash in on the renewed interest in the saucy former minister. It was, of course, poppycock: Pot Noodle is made by Unilever Bestfoods which, with its product development schedule, couldn't have introduced freeze-dried Edwina until next year at the earliest. By that time interest in Currie would have evaporated along with sales of her diaries. Nevertheless, the *Sun* fell for it and went to town with painful punnery about Pot Canoodling and how John Major would be "naan too happy".

Major, though, might have been not inconsiderably happy to see Edwina turned into a Pot Noodle. In that same week the company was also in the headlines for advertising its product as "The slag of all snacks." "Hurt Me You Slag," said one poster. Major doubtless feels Currie did precisely that.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


"CHEAP CHIC" IS IN DARLING..... EVERYONE'S DOING IT!!!
REALLY? BUT YOUR CLOTHES LOOK SO GOOD!
OXFAM
CHARITY SHOP
I PICKED THESE JEANS UP FOR 10 GRAND!
MY GOD THAT IS CHEAP!!!
OXFAM
CHARITY SHOP



SIGNAL FAILURES

Train of thought

THE government's integrated transport policy, launched four years ago, is in tatters.

In 1999 it commissioned 22 multi-modal studies of congestion blackspots to identify solutions involving several transport types. But it is making so little money available for rail, tram and bus schemes that the studies are turning out to be merely an elaborate and (at £30m) expensive way of justifying yet more roads.

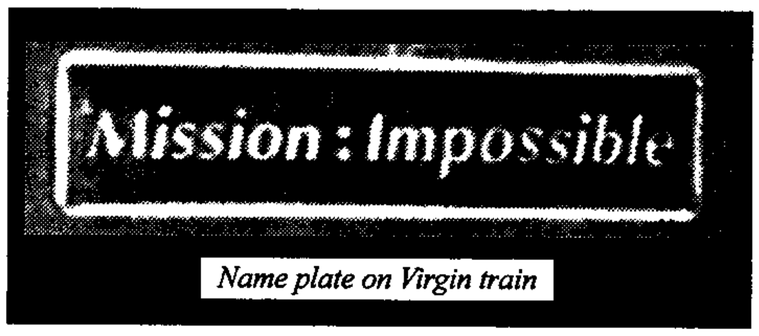
"New" Labour promised to switch freight from road to rail but has rejected a plan for a badly needed rail-freight terminal near Heathrow because the site lies partly in greenbelt. The terminal would be much smaller than the new airports the government wants on greenbelt land in Kent and the east Midlands but the companies involved lacked the air and road lobbies' political clout.

Road and air transport enjoy massive hidden subsidies while public funding for bus and rail is nearly a third of the European average. Train and bus fares have risen much faster than the cost of car and air travel.

What subsidy is available for rail is gobbled up by private companies, but "new" Labour won't stop the haemorrhage which funds profits, inter-company compensation, legal bills, directors' bonuses etc (see *Eyes passim*). Its strategic rail authority (SRA) admits the companies have failed to reduce operating costs and suggests those same companies should therefore be allowed to take more money off passengers.

Thus there's a yawning mismatch between the government's stated aims – environmental improvement, social inclusion, etc – and the private rail companies' aim to maximise profits. The rail network could take longer passenger trains but most operators prefer short trains to minimise leasing charges; overcrowding is then an excuse for higher fares.

The SRA implies higher train fares are needed to limit demand. That view contrasts with not only the government's attitude to air-travel demand but also the regulatory pressure on other utilities to cut tariffs; electricity prices aren't raised way above inflation to avoid the cost of new power stations. Ironically there's an environmental case for **increasing** energy prices and **reducing** rail fares, but the only time Tony Blair thinks green is when he's lecturing other countries on environmental responsibility at earth summits.



Name plate on Virgin train

Spot the difference

IN AN attempt to grab GNER's franchise in 2000, Virgin Rail proposed that sections of high-speed line, à la TGV, be built between London and Edinburgh. Richard Bowker, chairman and chief executive of the SRA, is so impressed with the principle he's commissioned consultants to examine it and wants a high-speed route built by 2015.

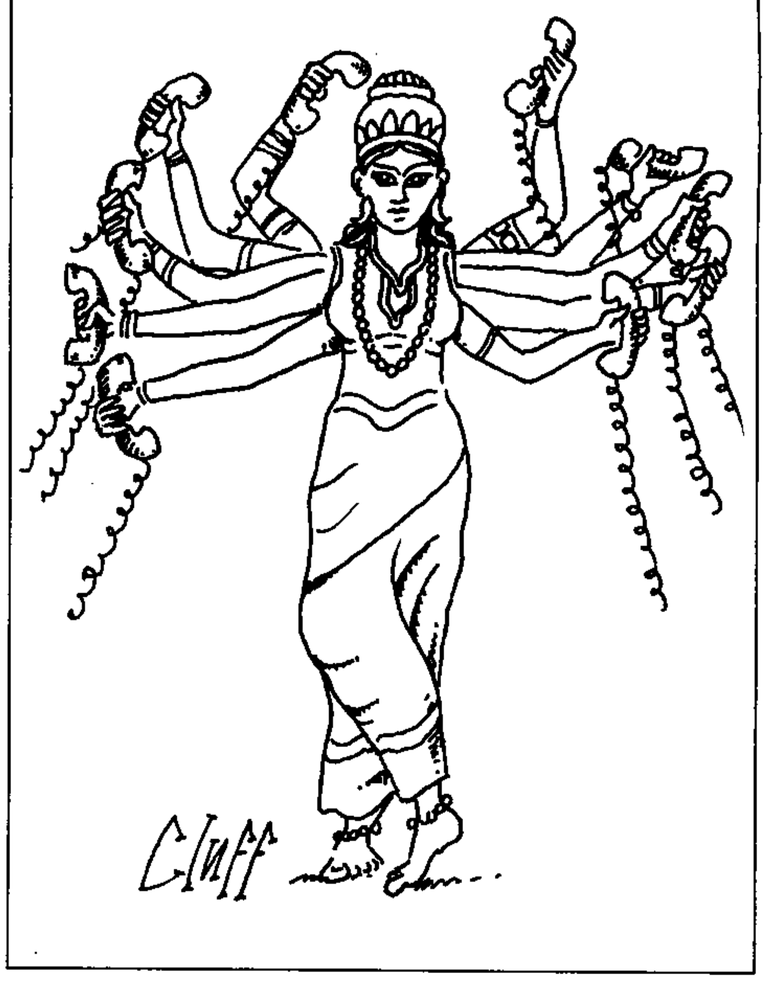
On 17 October First Great Western announced a study of possible sections of high-speed line between London and the south west. The SRA immediately rubbished the proposal, saying FGW should stick to the basics like running its trains on time rather than thinking long-term. It ridiculed the idea of a train operator "launching a study into something which... won't materialise until well beyond 2010".

PS: The team behind Virgin's brilliant high-speed proposal was led by Virgin Rail's then co-chairman, Richard Bowker, and included Jim Steer, then a transport consultant and now the SRA's director of strategic planning. Bowker has never worked for FirstGroup or FGW, whose high-speed proposal isn't to be taken seriously.

PPS: Although FGW's punctuality record is poor, Virgin's is much worse – yet somehow the SRA hasn't told Virgin publicly to get the basics right. Why ever not?

'Dr B. Ching'

Prudential Call Centre, Bombay



DOING THE ROUNDS

"MAKE no mistake. We will bite hard and where it hurts if that's what it takes to make the government understand it cannot use the NHS, those who work in it, as playthings." So said Dr Ian Bogle, British Medical Association (BMA) council chairman, in July. So why has the doctors' trade union (*sic*) negotiated a new employment contract with the department of health that many future and existing consultants vehemently oppose?

If the ballot result, due to be announced this week, is rejection, the government will doubtless spin it as greedy consultants declining a 20 percent pay rise to preserve their right to unfettered private practice. But the reality is more disturbing. Only 40 percent of consultants do significant private practice and very few (if any) are likely to get the 20 percent pay hike. Indeed, the lead DoH negotiator, Dr Andrew Foster, revealed the government's hand with a notorious presentation to hospital chief executives (http://www.doh.gov.uk/conferences/andrewfoster.ppt) which instructed them to "only pay extra for work already done to the deserving few who do the most".

However, given that NHS consultants work, on average, 10 hours more than their contracted hours for free, most of them should be in line for a reasonable pay rise if they approved the new contract. So why are so many reluctant to take the money? The problem, as with education, is the government's untested and unproven centralist reforms of the NHS. In his evidence to the health select committee immediately after the contract was announced, health secretary Alan Milburn claimed it would result in "better management grip" of the service.

Alas, few doctors have confidence in the management structure of the NHS, or the plethora of populist targets managers are obliged to chase, and they bitterly resent being forced to prioritise their work in ways that might get "new" Labour re-elected but don't treat patients according to clinical need.

The government's expensive ideas on improving access to the NHS, with walk-in clinics and NHS Direct, have not been proven to improve health or take the strain off existing services, and every surgeon has examples of being forced to do minor operations before major ones to meet a government waiting time directive.

Moreover, if you have a "non politically sexy" disease, your chances of specialist treatment are far less, as the debacle at St George's Pelvic Trauma Unit proved. Surgeon Martin Bircher has been told to cease taking specialist referrals for two months to concentrate on "waiting list work", forcing patients with complex pelvic trauma to be treated by non-specialists with often disastrous results.

The pressure on managers to hit targets is so great that they candidly admitting to "managing" their figures (*Eyes passim*), and all because Tony Blair has made a ludicrous pledge to "turn the NHS round" by the time of the next election.

Anaesthetist Dr Peter Tomlin has done a detailed analysis of doctors suspended from duty (www.scpnet.com) and found that many are sent on gardening leave indefinitely. And yet in only 14 percent of suspensions is any misdoing proven. It is far more likely for a doctor to be suspended after a political disagreement with the hospital management.

"If the present rate of suspensions continues, then during the professional life of a hospital consultant some 1,200-1,400 of his colleagues will have been suspended, ie 1 in 20. What is even more disturbing is that the reasons given for the suspensions continue to be more and more frivolous, and in the process increase the waste of public money."

It's hard to see how increasing the management grip on consultants will resolve this issue. The key barrier is that doctors don't feel led, motivated or inspired by the NHS management, and they don't trust the government or the DoH to deliver a better health service. They want less political interference in the NHS, not more, even if it means sacrificing a theoretical pay rise.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

I'VE BEEN TOLD I NEED AN OPERATION BUT I'M SCARED OF IT
THERE'S NO NEED TO BE...
CHANCES OF YOU SURVIVING THAT LONG ARE A MILLION TO ONE
WAITING LIST

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

CORRY SAUCE

QUICK as a flash, even before the committee on standards in public life can produce its report on special advisers, one of the most notorious of the breed has a new job.

Step forward Dan Corry, former special adviser to Stephen Byers, whose emails asking about the political sympathies of the victims of the Paddington rail crash earned him the contempt of almost everyone. Corry has settled into a comfortable new job as "executive director" of the new local government network (NLGN), a "think tank" which thinks up ways to make it easier for businessmen to make money out of Labour councils.

Hardly had he taken up his new job than he rushed out a pamphlet calling for a "new localism" to replace the "chaotic centralism" of the past. A glowing introduction was penned by Ed Balls, chief economic adviser to chancellor Gordon Brown, thoroughly approving the "flexibility" proposed in Corry's pamphlet.

Corry's co-author is Gerry Stoker, chair of the NLGN. Back in July Stoker co-authored another NLGN pamphlet advocating something called a "new public service ethos". His co-author on that occasion was that fine upholder of the public service ethos, Ron Aldridge… chairman of Crapita.

● **SANDWELL metropolitan borough council, which covers one of the 10 most deprived areas in the country, has spent £14,000 consulting residents about what its new name should be. It was a close run thing, with 49 percent of those who voted – just 4,000 out of a population of nearly 300,000 – backing a return to the old name of "West Bromwich". Fifty-one percent of residents, however, said they wanted the council to be called, er, "Sandwell metropolitan borough council". And so it will be. Someone said the exercise had made the council a laughing stock. But at least it wasn't a cheap laugh.**

TO ELLAND BACK

IS THE love affair between Leeds city council's Labour leaders and Leeds United boss Peter Ridsdale about to end amid acrimony and name-calling? Have the starstruck councillors finally realised that the chairmen of professional football clubs aren't necessarily the most reliable partners?

It was all sweetness and light when council chiefs put Ridsdale in charge of the city's schools and bent over backwards to accommodate the club's commercial developments and proposed move to a new stadium (*Eyes passim*). But debt-ridden Leeds Utd now wants to stay at its Elland Road home after all, and Ridsdale is demanding that the authority let LUFC have some adjacent land at a knockdown price to help fund the redevelopment of its existing stadium.

Unsurprisingly, councillors have not (yet) jumped at the chance of handing over a taxpayers' asset with a development value estimated at £12m. So, in his match programme notes on 19 October, Ridsdale accused the council of damaging the previous "co-operative and sympathetic partnership". He told fans: "There are regrettably some people who feel it is in their best interest to play politics with our aspirations and are therefore proving to be less than helpful."

Funny that. He's an unelected football club chairman who chairs Education Leeds, the unelected quango that runs the city's schools – and he's accusing elected councillors of playing politics. Could be the end of a beautiful friendship.

● **SITTING in a Scotland Yard safe is a parcel containing £80,000 in used £50, £20 and £5 notes which mysteriously arrived at a Hackney post office followed by a note explaining that it was "for the council". Inspector Knacker has two theories: that one of the fraudsters with which the council is riddled has acquired a guilty conscience and is returning some of his or her loot; and, only slightly less unlikely, that it is a particularly inept attempt at a bribe. Otherwise Knacker is clueless.**

A RATE CON

LOCAL authorities have kept very quiet about a court of appeal ruling in November 1999 which found that thousands of businesses had been massively overcharged for rates.

The judgment in *R v Hodgetts, ex-parte Nationwide Building Society* concerned the highly technical issue of transitional relief on business rates post-1990 and the way the regulations were interpreted. Bizarrely, the judges placed the onus on ratepayers to pursue their local authorities for refunds, and imposed no duty on councils to tell the often small businesses that they were eligible, nor to pay interest on overcharged amounts. Hundreds of millions of pounds are involved.

A number of canny surveying firms have cashed in by trawling the public records for businesses that have been overcharged and then offering to recover the money for a commission of 30 percent of the refund, or more. One small "new media" business in central London found Westminster city council had overcharged it by more than £30,000. Had it not been for the intervention of an expensive surveyor the money, more than 10 percent of its annual turnover, would still be in council coffers. With the surveyors' fees and loss of interest the company, while happy to receive the windfall, is still some £12,000 poorer as a result of the commission and lost interest.

Would local authorities have been so reticent about publicising the judgment had it ruled that the ratepayers had *under*paid?

BUSTER BONEHEAD

BRITAIN'S most dimwitted councillors (clue: they run the Isle of Wight) have excelled themselves.

The council, in the person of Ventnor Botanic Gardens curator Simon Goodenough, commissioned a 20ft replica of an Easter Island statue from local sculptor Clare Taylor as part of an environmental project. Taylor spent two months making it with metal from scrapped cars and sold it to the council for a "nominal" £1,000 because it was for a good cause and would be displayed in public.

It was duly erected in the gardens on a cliff edge, moodily looking out to sea. But a group of councillors, led by the bufferish independent Albert "Buster" Bartlett, decided they didn't like it. It didn't have planning permission, they said, so it would have to come down, and it did. The council has refused to let Taylor – a nominee for next year's Turner Prize – have her work back.

At first IoW council's spokesman said it might be sold. As it would be worth up to £20,000 on the open market this naturally did not please Taylor, given that she let IoW have it for next to nothing. The council now says the head will eventually be re-erected at "a more appropriate location". For the time being the statue remains out of sight, rusting on its side, next to the botanic garden's compost heap. No wonder they call it "dinosaur island".

Warballs

"We need escapism at this time in our history. Kylie is a fantasy. After 11 September people need that."

— Jason Donaldson, owner of Kylie Minogue fansite kylieusa.com, in the Melbourne *Age*.

"When the nation is threatened, for example following 11 September, people feel a collective vulnerability and this becomes embedded in the national psyche… New York saw a rise in the rates of both sexually transmitted infections and pregnancies post 11 September and I suspect the same has happened here in Britain."

— From the "Grassroots" column of *Sexual Health News*, published by Durex.

"Biosecurity and bioterrorism have become hot topics worldwide since 11 September 2001, and the effect has been felt even in aquaculture. Opening yesterday's Alpharma animal health conference in Inverness, Professor Ron Roberts pointed out that growing awareness of biosecurity in the USA has had a knock-on effects on the salmon industry in Chile."

— Fiona Cameron, *Intrafish*.

"It was neither the time nor the place to dwell on the traumatic aftermath of the Bali bombings but the visiting president of Disney Theatrical and Disney Animation could not ignore it either. Here to promote *The Lion King*, which Disney is bringing to Sydney in October next year, the animated Tom Schumacher assured travel industry representatives at Angel Place yesterday that the mega-musical was 'a healing thing'."

— *Sydney Morning Herald*.

"Take Your Own Stand Against Terrorism! Buy a .us domain name from any NeuStar-accredited registrar at www.getmy.us during September 2002 and NeuStar will donate $1 of your purchase price to the Rewards For Justice Fund… This unique promotion is an easy way for you to play a key role in keeping our world safe – at no extra cost."

— Mailing from Richard Tindal, vice-president of sales and marketing, NeuStar.

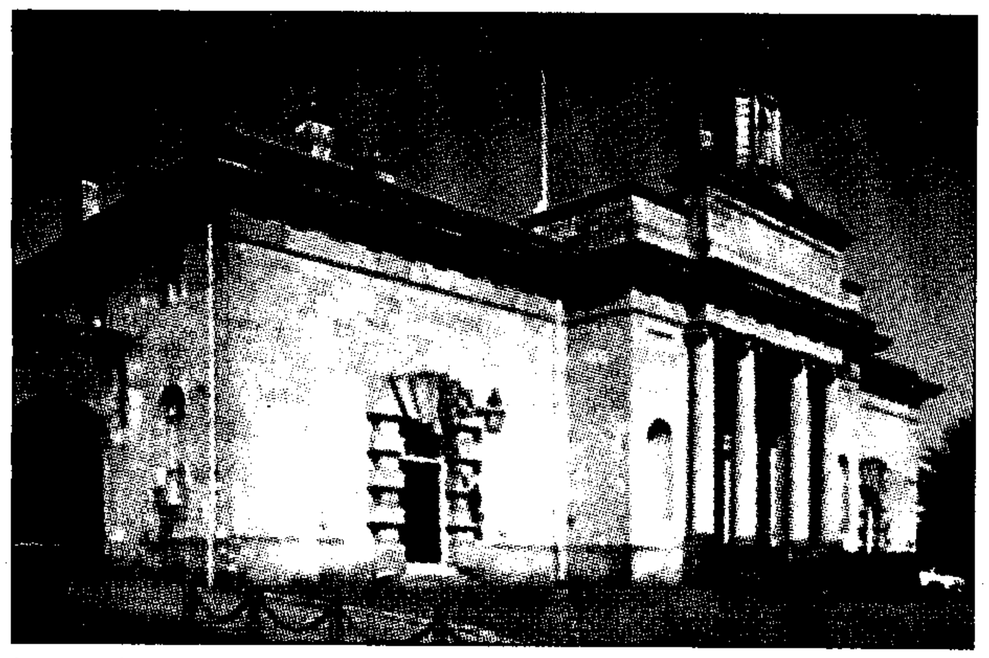
IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

I'M SORRY, JEZ, BUT THESE DISGUST ME!
DEGRADING, TACKY, THE FEMALE FORM TARNISHED...
DON'T ANY OF THESE PEOPLE HAVE "PHOTOSHOP"? THE SCAN QUALITY IS APPALLING
I MEAN, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL FROM THIS PICTURE IF "CYNTHIA" REALLY IS A PRE-OP TRANSVESTITE

NOOKS and CORNERS

UNTIL 1997 Knutsford had the dubious distinction of being represented by Neil Hamilton, the MP for Tatton; but the Cheshire town has other more savoury claims to fame. Mrs Gaskell, the novelist, lived there and is commemorated by the Gaskell Memorial Tower rising above the Belle Epoque restaurant in King Street, one of several wildly eccentric Ruskinian buildings erected by Richard Harding Watt.

In fact, in addition to Neil and Christine's lovely home in the suburbs, Knutsford is rich in fine and



interesting historic buildings. One of the grandest is the former Sessions House (pictured above), now the crown court, which the lord chancellor's department wishes to close and dispose of – despite opposition from the county council, Macclesfield borough council and the town council, let alone the people of Knutsford, local judges and magistrates and the present MP for Tatton, George Osborne.

Knutsford Session House was built with handsome brown stone in 1818, along with the now-demolished gaol. It has a grand Ionic portico and wings with massive rusticated doors – worthy of Vanbrugh – to represent the majesty and severity of the law. The design used to be attributed to Thomas Harrison of Chester, but is now known to be the work of George Moneypenny. It is an ornament to the town and a noble and useful building, complete with the original court interiors (much used in films).

The lord chancellor's department though prefers justice to be seen to be done in reassuringly modern surroundings of the sort the government's private finance initiative (PFI) can provide. Swish new crown courts have just opened in Chester, conveniently coinciding with the announcement in April that Knutsford's Sessions House does not meet modern standards — despite the fact that the year before the lord chancellor's department denied rumours that it was planning to close the court and a month before claimed that no closure would be made without local consultation.

One reason Moneypenny's building may seem inadequate is that, despite its Grade II* listing, it has been neglected by its owner for years: gutters have not been cleared and recently part of a ceiling collapsed, narrowly missing two defendants in the dock. Now the government announces that it will cost £5m to repair it – as if that justifies abandoning its responsibilities and depriving Knutsford of its local court.

This case reveals much about "new" Labour's attitude to public and historic buildings. A similar decision has recently been made in Exeter, which has resulted in the proposal to sell Rougemont Castle – fine 18th century buildings on a site dating back to the Conqueror — to a private developer to convert into flats. No doubt Knutsford Sessions House can be damagingly converted into another bar or restaurant.

COMPARED with the fate of this magnificent courthouse, approval for a caravan site might seem trivial; but it also reveals the spinelessness of this government's attitude to the environment.

Caravan sites, particularly the "permanent" ones filled with immobile plastic shacks, can be a blight and easily as hideous as the worst housing developments. But the real scandal is the unfettered power enjoyed by the Caravan Club (patron: the Duke of Edinburgh) in granting permission for sites for touring caravans.

A revealing case has arisen in the Cumbrian village of Barbon where a Mr Trevelyan has applied to the Caravan Club for a certificate to park five caravans in his walled garden within the village. The Caravan Club obliged, without consulting either the local authority or neighbours, even though the site is close to residential properties and can only be reached via narrow lanes.

In response to objections (from South Lakeland district council, the county council, Cumbria Historic Gardens Trust etc), the Caravan Club responded that factors in favour of granting a licence include "visual improvement of land already positive" (whatever that may mean) and that the site is "well-screened: highly suitable for proposed use" when, in fact, it is visible from beautiful, landscaped Barbon Park.

In fact the Caravan Club can simply ignore objections with impunity as it has powers to grant such licences under the 1960 planning act and the 1995 general permitted development order. The Council for the Preservation of Rural England supported a recent proposal that such permitted development rights for temporary uses should be removed, but the government, after "public consultation", has cravenly abandoned this. Perhaps covering the land with caravans as well as hypermarkets and houses is all part of Labour's grand vision for the countryside?

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

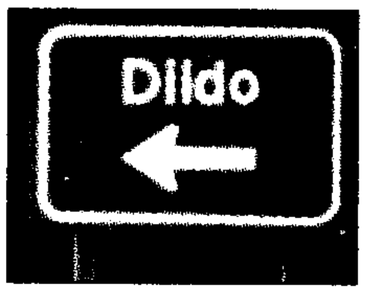
BY BIRCH

Matt can't wait for Bush to invade Iraq.
How could you?
That's outrageous!
He wants to be a War Artist.
Ah well, that's different.
I can empathise with that.

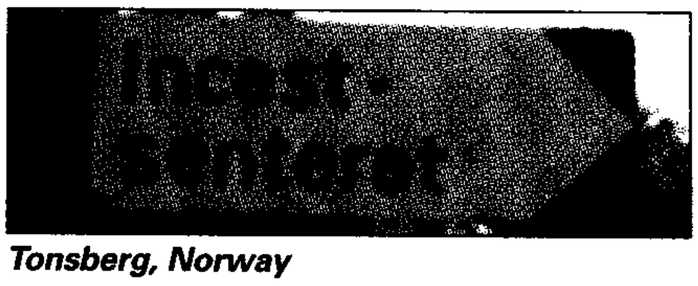
I-SPY

Submitted by B. Dawson, Simon Cutler, Ian Cadman, Ivan Roots.
£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Austria



Newfoundland



Tonsberg, Norway

St Nazaire, France

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

SIMON RATTLE's arrival in London with his new toy, the Berlin Philharmonic, was one massive lovefest in which conductor and orchestra spared no effort to show how well they're getting on.

In fact they're getting on so well the management had made a special point of briefing the German embassy that all advance publicity should refer not to the Berlin Philharmonic but to the *Berliner Philharmoniker* – presumably to emphasise that this is still a German band, with no plans to decamp to Birmingham.

Further south, meanwhile, another lovematch doesn't seem to be igniting. At the start of Glyndebourne's annual tour which, as always, begins at Glyndebourne itself, there was much whispering in the shrubbery about the future of Vladimir Jurowski, the whizzkid Russian who has just taken up his appointment as music director.

It was curious that Glyndebourne made so little of his debut in the pit this summer, merely giving him a revival of an old *Albert Herring* guaranteed not to attract too much attention. Nor did it. With a largely undistinguished or ill-chosen cast it made no impact. Better luck next year, we thought.

But now the 2003 season has been published it's clear Jurowski again has a poor deal. Of three new productions, the high-profile *Tristan* will be conducted by Jiri Belohlavek; the media-draw *Idomeneo* (director Peter Sellars, designer Anish Kapoor) will be conducted by Simon Rattle; and that leaves only a lightweight-looking *Fledermaus* for Jurowski. Not much of a showcase for a man supposedly in charge.

But then Glyndebourne has a way of indicating to men supposedly in charge that they're nothing of the sort. Nicholas Snowman was shown the door almost before he'd had time to put his name on it as chief executive. And it was Snowman who, during his brief reign, engaged Jurowski.

Now Jurowski has arrived he's faced with a new administrative team – David Pickard as chief exec, Gus Christie as chairman – that had no part in his appointment. Reading the runes, it looks unlikely he will feature in their long-term plans. Whom they'd approach instead is anybody's guess; but while Jurowski has only one show next year, *two* of the revivals are conducted by Mark Wigglesworth: a name to watch.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

DOWN ON THE FARM

ON ALL sides we hear how the future of Europe's farming lies in root-and-branch reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP).

The parrot cry of the reformers (including Britain's Rosa Klebb, aka Margaret Beckett) is that we must shift subsidies from production (fat cheques for barley barons) towards looking after the "environment". Farmers must be paid not for over-producing barley and sheep but as "stewards of the countryside". In this way, argue Rosa and pals like the Green ex-social worker Renate Kunast, who is Germany's farm minister, the birds, bees and flowers will be brought back to our poison-drenched prairie fields and even hardened city dwellers will accept that there might after all be a case for continuing to lavish £30bn a year of taxpayers' money on the EU's farmers.

Like everything else about the EU, it may sound fine in theory. But what about the practice?

As it happens, we at last have hard evidence of what happens when EU farm subsidies are directed towards enhancing the environment. It comes in a confidential report drawn up for the Scottish executive and leaked to Kirsty Macleod, a farmer who helps run *Fresh Air*, a new magazine devoted to exposing the devastating effects of bureaucracy on Scotland's countryside.

The Scottish farm ministry Serad commissioned a bevy of organisations headed by the Macaulay land use research institute to look into the ecological record of Scotland's environmentally sensitive areas (Esas). Under two EU directives, in the past 15 years vast tracts of Scotland, from the Borders to the Cairngorms, from Loch Lomond to the Western Isles, have been designated as Esas and landowners have received EU subsidies to look after their land in a way which protects or enhances the environment. As such, Esas provide a model for how Rosa and her fellow-reformers would like to see almost all EU farm subsidies spent in future.

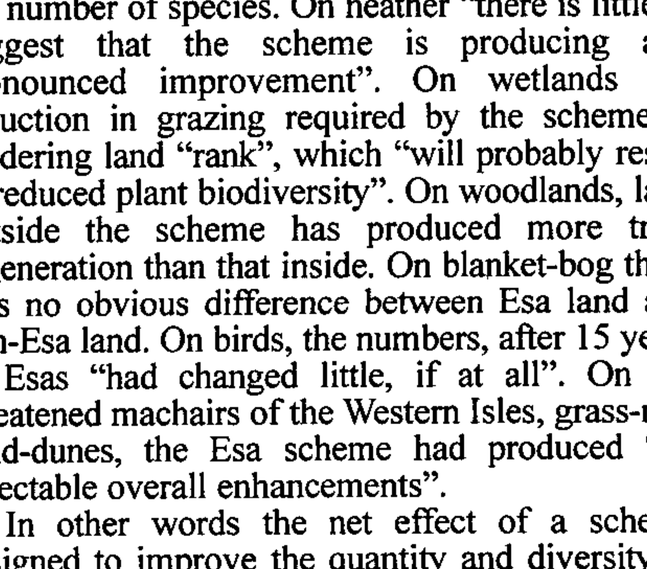
Under headings covering the main habitat-types the system is designed to protect, Serad's experts, including the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, report how effective Esa schemes have been by comparing the record of land covered by Esas with land outside them.

On "herb-rich grassland" they found the Esa scheme had produced "no significant increases" in the number of species. On heather "there is little to suggest that the scheme is producing any pronounced improvement". On wetlands the reduction in grazing required by the scheme is rendering land "rank", which "will probably result in reduced plant biodiversity". On woodlands, land outside the scheme has produced more tree-regeneration than that inside. On blanket-bog there was no obvious difference between Esa land and non-Esa land. On birds, the numbers, after 15 years of Esas "had changed little, if at all". On the threatened machairs of the Western Isles, grass-rich sand-dunes, the Esa scheme had produced "no detectable overall enhancements".

In other words the net effect of a scheme designed to improve the quantity and diversity of wildlife over several million acres has been insignificant.

'Muckspreader'

Fresh Air can be obtained by emailing imitchell@ukonline.co.uk



"Personally, I've always been in favour of enlargement"

Letters

Private Eye

All at sea

Sir,

In your piece about freebies enjoyed by Tory and Unionist MPs to Bophuthatswana (p3, 1065), you mention glowing reports about Bop's beaches. Could this be the same Bop which lies hundreds of miles inland far removed from any beaches other than the man-made ones at the Sun City complex?

Yours swimmingly,
JON MYMIN,

Via email.

Byte back

Sir,

Boffin (Eye 1065) appears not to be moving with the times. Granted, 200 gigabytes of data a day sounds superficially terrifying, but that cheap and nasty DVD player you just bought from Woolies can throw over 1,000 gigabytes at your screen in 24 hours.

Of course, just because a £100 consumer product can cope five times over, that doesn't mean Capita won't screw it up.

Regards,
CLIVE JONES,

Via e-mail.

Lookalike

Susan

Laurence

Sir,

I wonder if fear of tonsorial abuse is the only thing that American feminist Susan Sontag shares with TV's Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen? Surely not chintz?

Yours,
ENA B. RUSHTON,

London SW6.

Ethics man

Sir,

Thanks for making me the star of Media News. Now I know I must be truly important.

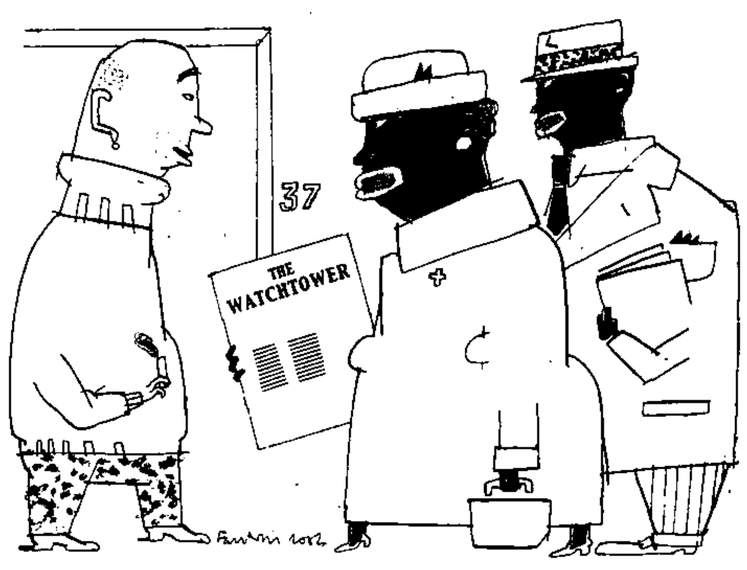
In fairness though to Nicky Campbell, bulldog presenter of Watchdog, I should point out that I WAS grilled about my premium rate phone lines. He made the very point you make. How can I put down an astrologer for profiting from prediction, when I am doing the very same? My reply: in this field, it is not what you do, but how you do it – and what ethical policies you follow while you are doing it.

Now to your suggestion that I peddle twaddle to the weak and vulnerable. I strongly dispute that and think it is only fair that your readers have a chance to know the truth. So I implore them all to call me on 0906 60 12345 (calls cost 60p per minute).

All the best,
JONATHAN CAINER,

Oulston, N. Yorks.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Oh, hi! Come on in. I've often thought about being a Jehovah's Witness"

Care and the community

Sir,

The Bettercare vs Office of Fair Trading (OFT) decision is not about private care homes being able to flourish (forgive the sardonic laughter – why have 20 percent gone bankrupt in the last four years?) or about privatisation of the health service.

Long term care is already privatised, chummy, and you had better get used to it as a fact of life. We look after about 475,000 people at the last count, which is more than the total beds of the NHS and social services combined. Our sector represents an investment of about £12bn, and any parliamentary candidate (or journalist) who thinks he can replace that with public facilities in the lifetime of half a dozen parliaments needs to be admitted to one of our homes. We are also the 6th largest employer in the country.

What the Bettercare decision was about is fairness – to the taxpayer as much as anyone else. When the competition act came on to the books a couple of years ago, we all thought "great, now the council will have to pay us the same rate as they pay themselves". No such luck. The office of fair trading held that the act only applied to commercial undertakings, and as local councils and health authorities were not undertakings they were free to pursue whatever unfair practices they thought might be fun.

As the majority purchaser of long term care, local authorities were able to turn the screws on prices as much as they wanted, and as a quart of long term care had to be paid for out of a pint of money, they did exactly that.

The court's recent decision has held that as public bodies purchase care in competition with their own provision they are undertaking, and must obey commercial rules. I would think that Lord Gnome would be in favour of fairness and level playing fields, and value for the taxpayer, unless of course Rotten Boroughs is all a joke and public bodies are inherently more worthy than nursing home owners, who regularly eat children for breakfast and grind the faces of the poor. The public gets a bloody good deal out of the private sector. Ask my satisfied customers. Not all the cowboys have yet ridden off into the sunset, and the new national standards are long overdue for regulating the bad homes, but most homes do a good job because they care about what they are doing, and they do it very economically for the taxpayer.

Kind regards,
ANDREW MAKIN,

Long suffering nursing home owner and devout subscriber so print it you sods.

A bullied teacher has been awarded a £230,000 payout for personal injury and loss of earnings after being forced out of his job by his head.

Grauniad

Solid resistance

Sir,

Normally an admirer of this column and its scarification of our incomparably incompetent government, I would, just this time, like to cover Gumboot in a load of his own manure.

He tells those of us who live in the country that we should be prepared for, or even welcome, a load of crap. Just try it before recommending it, I say.

South West Water dumps thousands of tons of sewage on our local farmer's fields from June to September. Let me tell you, it has not been treated – otherwise how do baby nappies and tampons appear on the fields? Last year they dumped so much on one field that, in spite of the requirement to plough it in within 24 hours, they had to build a wall of straw bales round the dump to prevent it sliding downhill into our village. When it rained, it slid, but no one did anything to prosecute them in spite of the blatant criminal act. When the wind is in the wrong direction, uncontrolled illegal dumping like this makes outdoor life impossible in summer.

Maybe Gumboot, like other farmers, is willing to be paid for allowing breaches of the law to occur on his land, but the rest of us should be unhappy about untreated sewage being dumped on the ground on which our food is grown. And don't tell me that the Environment Agency really checks that the rules that require land treated with "sludge" not to be used for crops used for human use are actually applied.

Yours,
MICHAEL JAMES,
Dorchester, Dorset.

Sir,

In stating that biosolids or sewage sludge should be used on the land, Gumboot has his head firmly buried in the crapper. If only human wastes entered sewage treatment plants, then sewage sludge would contain only nutrients and should be returned to the land. Unfortunately, most sewage treatment plants also receive agricultural and industrial toxic wastes, creating a poorly-understood mixture of nutrients and poisons. It's relatively easy to kill bacteria and other pathogens with treatment, but impossible to get rid of many of the other contaminants.

Many of these toxins have known ill effects on health even in small quantities, including cancer, neurotoxicity, developmental disorders, hormonal disruption, and learning and behavioural difficulties.

Sincerely,
CLAIRE ROBINSON,
Chagford, Devon.

Free plug

Sir,

I have never received a free Tag Heuer watch. Hopefully, however, I will do now.

DYLAN JONES,
Editor, GQ.

Miami vice

Sir,

The situation in Florida is even worse than you describe in "Letter from Florida". The software used in the new electronic voting machines is not open to independent scrutiny because the suppliers claim it is a "trade secret"!

As there is no physical log (such as a printed audit trail as used in the cheapest shop till) it's impossible for any voting errors to be detected. Neither is it possible months or years later to re-examine the votes should there be evidence of error or fraud.

By allowing the software that drives the voting machines to be classified as a "trade secret" Florida has given up all control over the voting process and leaves itself wide open to the possibility of elections being stolen.

Our own government isn't much more sophisticated. Their desire to make voting sexy via the use of email and text messaging is equally open to fraud unless suitable precautions are taken and publicly audited by independent, expert, third parties.

GEOFF LANE,
Bury.

Keeping schtum

Sir,

I know you public school classics and arts publishing types pride yourselves on being useless at maths, but prima facie the ignorance extends to German too. While in Latin or French you have no difficulty using the mot juste, the word stumm (silent, dumb) always seems to end up as shtum or schtoom or some such. Could do better.

Yours etc,
DAVID MILLER,
Hitchin, Herts.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The atmosphere here is thick and fast."
CHRIS KAMARA
(John Hurst)

"Ian Pearce... has limped off with what looks like a shoulder injury."
TONY COTTEE, Sky Sports 1
(Mike Kilpatrick)

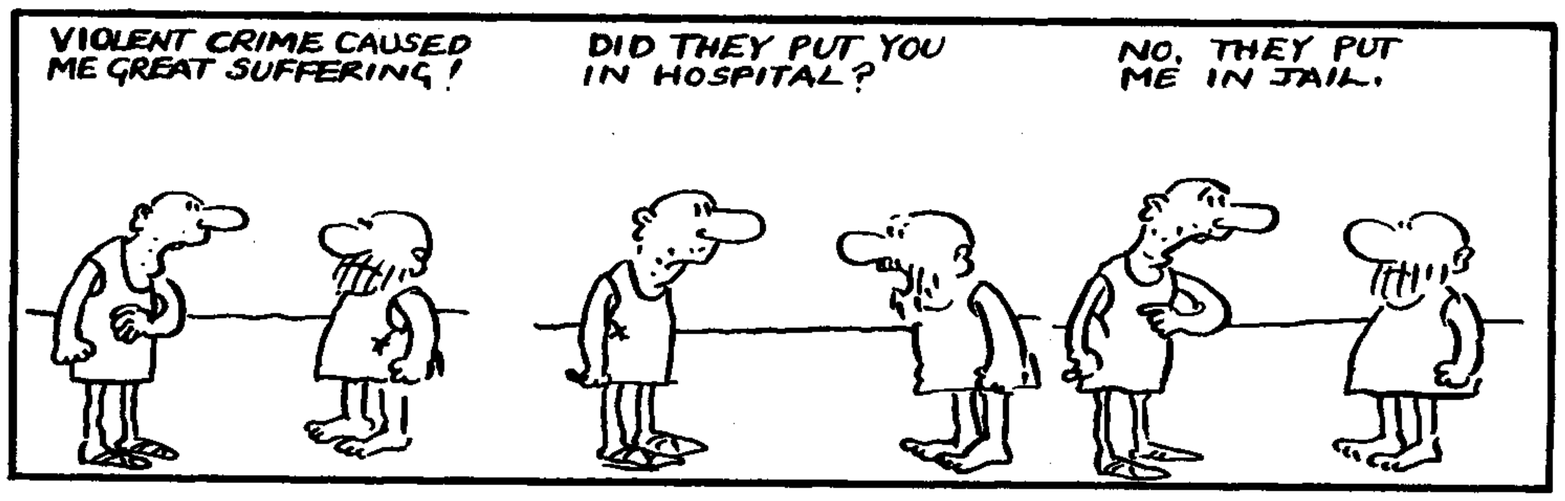
"You should not leave someone's ashes on a doorstep, whether they are deceased or not."
TOM BULL (Funeral Services Director)
(Michael Bergmann)

"Referees don't come down here with a particular flavoured shirt on."
STEVE COPPELL
(Matthew Turner)

"They'll try to kick it into touch, as it's the only way to keep the ball in play."
BBC political commentator
(John Old)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



A local shop for local people

Sir,

As a resident of Hove who also has an office adjacent to the proposed Tesco development, I was amused to read the site described as "a rare sylvan scene in this once-peaceful nook". I believe the phrase the writer was grasping for was: "a derelict gasworks in a retail environment composed mainly of carbon-copy charity shops".

I am not a particular fan of Tesco; however, 12 months ago my partner and I made the decision to ditch our car (after all, we only ever used it to travel to the orbital-centre supermarket three miles away). Since then I have had to content myself with buying our evening meals from the local Co-op, which I overheard another frustrated shopper describe recently as "like shopping in Soviet Russia" – if you want bread, make sure you get there early on pension day.

I am not entirely sure why the writer feels this "grotesque scheme" will "drain the life-blood from Hove", when his solution seems to be to build more houses to house more people who will, like ourselves, have no evening access to a reasonable variety of foodstuffs unless they get in their cars and congest the roads by travelling to out-of-town retail shopping centres. Thousands of people live within easy walking distance of the supermarket site, and its proposed development reverses the trend that has really drained the life-blood from urban centres: namely, placing major food stores in areas that can only be reached by those with motor cars.

Yours sans auto,
STEVE PARKER,
Hove.

Bargain abasement

Sir,

Your cuttings contributor made an understandable mistake in thinking the multiple appearance of Bargain Hunt in the 28 September Times TV Guide was erroneous (Eye 1065). UK Style really did devote a whole weekend to bouffant boot-sale pundit David Dickinson's finest 36 hours.

Clearly delighted when the BBC turned the sex god of the Steradent Set into a primetime celebrity, schedulers at the bargain-basement channel (UK Style, that is) realised their suitcase of old daytime episodes had instantly appreciated in value, and offloaded it as a themed weekend.

I expect you've been deluged with letters from people who saw this televisual treat. Oh, right. Just me then?

Yours faithfully,
STEVE ELLIS,
Via email.

Letter from **Lima**

from Our Own Correspondent

IT was meant to be a new era of probity and integrity for Peru. After all, our image took a battering last year when a huge library of secret videos emerged showing our chief spook Vladimiro Montesinos bribing and corrupting almost every politician, judge and civil servant in the country.

As a result Montesinos fled and then-president Alberto Fujimori sought asylum in Japan. Alejandro Toledo, a bright economist who had fought his way out of poverty, was elected to clean up the country and end our "decade of shame".

Unfortunately for the new president, during the campaign there were persistent rumours that he himself starred in one Montesinos video. He appeared to be drunk and enjoying the favours of several young ladies. Mr Toledo explained that he had been kidnapped, drugged and forced to take part in the orgy.

Strangely, this particular video has never been made public. Some say the owners of Peru's TV channels agreed not to show it for the good of the country; others say it is with opposition politicians who are just waiting until it can do maximum damage.

The president's morals have also been questioned regarding a 14-year-old girl named Zarai, whose mother had filed a paternity suit against him 10 year ago. Zarai appeared on TV during the election campaign to make her claim, which the president denied. But when a judge recently ordered him to take a DNA test, the president alleged he was too busy. Now he has acknowledged an affair with Zarai's mother and offered her a $100,000 settlement.

The episode has not exactly pleased our first lady, Belgian-born Eliane Karp. She was first reported to have said that if her husband was indeed Zarai's father, she would be on the first plane back to Brussels. Now apparently she has calmed down and is standing by her man.

This could be because she herself is in trouble. A few weeks ago it emerged that she was being paid $10,000 a month as an agricultural adviser to one of Peru's leading banks. Not only is this five times more than most Peruvians earn in a year, but the bank paying her has been accused of being closely involved in scandals surrounding Montesinos and the previous regime. La Karp, as she is known, only grudgingly agreed to step down, arguing bitterly that it was her right as a citizen to work wherever and however she wished.

It seems she only wants to be an ordinary citizen when it suits her though. At other times she expects to enjoy the privileges of being first lady – and some. She promised that if her husband won the presidency, she would give up Belgian nationality and become Peruvian. A passionate student of the indigenous cultures and languages of her adopted country, she wanted the naturalisation ceremony to take place in Cuzco, the centre of the indigenous Inca civilization. To ensure all her friends could be present, she commandeered the presidential plane and several airforce helicopters to fly them hundreds of kilometres to the Inca heartlands. When it was pointed out that taking Peruvian nationality should have been an entirely private matter, she expressed amazement and couldn't see what was wrong.

The president's wife arouses such passion that two politicians have almost fought over her. An independent member of congress recently challenged vice-president David Waisman to a duel after Waisman called him a coward for attacking la Karp's behaviour. Waisman declined to fight saying he was a civilised man of peace whose beliefs prevented him taking someone else's life. As such he seems to be the only person in government in Lima with any moral beliefs at all right now.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

O "For two thousand years, bereaved families have had only two primary options to help them through the grieving process," Greg Herro told a press conference in Chicago. "Until now, burial or cremation were the only realistic alternatives, but here at LifeGem Memorials, we can now offer you a third option. Yes, our created diamond can provide you with a unique and timeless memorial to the life of a loved one. And better still, it's one that you can wear."

Herro, the company's Chief Executive Officer, then explained how the process of gemification worked. "We call it 'From Cremation to Creation'. Using patent-pending technology, our scientists are now able to separate and harvest the carbon from a person's cremated remains. And a diamond that takes millions of years to occur naturally can now be created from the carbon of your loved one in a matter of months, and worn by you in a ring or pendant, in memory of the deceased. They have the same brilliance, fire, and hardness as any high-quality diamond you may find at Tiffany's. And because it is a diamond, the LifeGem is durable, mobile, and sure to become a cherished family heirloom.

"We are working with funeral directors and crematoriums around the country, and with our new technology, we will very soon be able to create near-flawless diamonds of up to 3 carats, in blue, red, or yellow. The LifeGem is one of the most unique and priceless created diamonds in the world, but it is not only valuable because of the quality, color, and cut of the diamond produced. It will also serve as a unique personal remembrance that incites personal conversations and fond recollections for the bereaved. The service is also available for pets." *(Business Wire, 20/8/02. Spotter: George Adams)*

— O —

O *"Having reviewed the evidence, the committee is satisfied that the ban on dwarf-tossing is not abusive," a spokesman for the United Nations Human Rights Committee told reporters in Geneva. "In their view, the ban does not amount to prohibited discrimination, and is necessary in order to protect public order. And furthermore, there are issues of human dignity to consider."*

But Manuel Wackenheim, a three-feet-seven-inch stuntman who was trying to overturn a 1995 ruling by France's highest administrative court, was outraged. "This sport was introduced into Europe from the United States and Australia in the 1980s, and for years I used to earn good money by allowing big men to throw me as far as possible, usually in a bar or a discotheque. They would compete to see who could throw me the furthest, and I had the satisfaction of earning my own living. And I suffered no harm, because I

always wore a crash helmet and padded clothing with handles on the back, But since the ban was introduced, many short people have found themselves unemployed, because society offers few good jobs to people as small as me. Many of them have gone from being financially independent to relying on welfare. Where is the dignity in that?" (Reuters, 27/9/02. Spotter: Ian Richards)

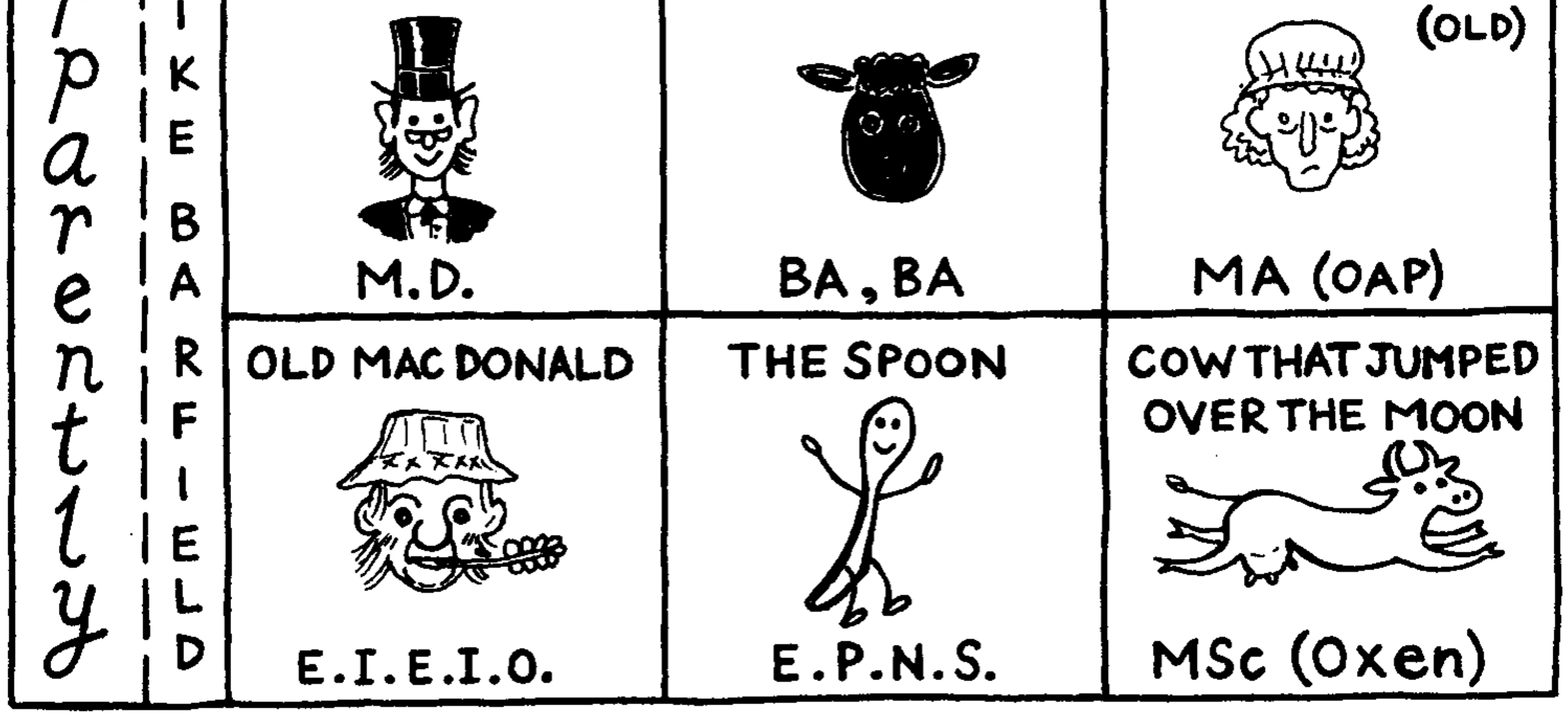
— O —

O *Farting as a Defence against Unspeakable Dread* by **M. Sidoli**.

This paper describes some features of the behaviour of a severely disturbed adopted latency boy. Peter was born premature, suffered several early hospitalizations and surgical operations, and at 2 months of age was removed from his mother's care by Social Services for neglect and abandonment. Although his subsequent development has been clouded by a series of losses and sudden changes of caregivers, Peter has maintained an unexpected desire to relate, showing considerable innate resilience. When feeling endangered, Peter had developed a defensive olfactive container using his bodily smell and farts to envelop himself in a protective cloud of familiarity against the dread of falling apart, and to hold his personality together.

In the paper Fordham's views of development and Anzieu's concept of psychic envelopes constitute the theoretical underpinning. Bion's concepts of beta- and alpha-elements are discussed in relation to Jung's views on symbolic development and psychological containment. *(Journal of Analytical Psychology, April 1996. Spotter Peter Owen)*

apparently BY MIKE BARFIELD



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

I know that everyone in the parish is in a state of shock at the sad news that Mrs Morris has announced her resignation as our head teacher at the St Albion's primary school, after only two terms.

Estelle came to us with the best possible qualifications – 3 O-Levels and a driving licence – and we had the very highest hopes for the school under her inspired leadership. It would be silly to pretend that there have not been one or two setbacks since she took over.

It is true, for instance, that not one pupil has passed the basic literary and numeracy tests this year, despite their papers being re-marked by Mrs Morris herself.

It was obviously a pity that the school failed to open for several weeks at the beginning of term because Mrs Morris hadn't got around to organising the staff-vetting procedures properly, owing to a "faulty computer" (at least that was her story!).

It was equally unfortunate that when some of the boys attempted to murder the geography teacher, Mrs Morris foolishly tried to get them expelled.

But, hey, wasn't it refreshing to hear Estelle holding up her hand and saying, "Forgive me, Vicar, I'm not up to the job. I am going to resign"? Isn't there a lesson there for all of us? (Not me, obviously!)

Wouldn't it be wonderful if more people behaved like Estelle and admitted they were just no good at their jobs?

Of course, I am not thinking of anyone in particular, but can you imagine our treasurer Mr Brown standing up in front of the PCC and saying, "Sorry, Tony, I can't do my sums properly. I somehow seem to have lost £7 billion from the parish stewardship fund. I'd better step down"?

No, sadly. We have to live in the real world. And in the real world we all have to live with the mistakes of those who have let us down, me more than anyone!

But the thing that really doesn't help is when people resign without being asked to.

If Mrs Morris thought she wasn't any good, why did she take the job in the first place?

Estelle has let me down very badly, as she knew perfectly well that my top priority in the parish has always been education

(except when it has been our local hospital or the bus service or Mr Birt's excellent plans for the church car park).

Now, thanks to Mrs Morris's thoughtlessness, we are right back where we started, with our school in chaos, morale at rock bottom and the need for a new headteacher to come in to sort it all out.

I know some of you will be saying, "Look, Vicar, why don't you do the job yourself? You're the only person in the parish who's any good."

Well, okay and thanks for that! But I do have some rather more important jobs in my in-tray at the present time, such as standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the Rev. Dubya Bush in his great crusade against the power of Satan wherever he rears his evil head, be it Bali or Baghdad.

But, hey. I don't want to end on a sour note! So, let's all wish Estelle the very best in her efforts to find a new job (which, I have to say, with her record and her rotten qualifications, will be very unlikely!).

Best wishes,

Tony

PS. Mrs Blackstone has very kindly agreed to organise a whip-round for Estelle's leaving present. So far, this has raised £1.27. Well done, everyone!

Thanks!

Thank you to Mr Prescott from the Working Men's Club for dealing with the firemen over beer and sandwiches(!).

John really speaks their language and has done a terrific job in averting a potential catastrophe – ie, the Vicar looking a bit silly.

I told them I would never give in to their unreasonable demands – but now John has, which has made everything alright. T.B.

Women's Groups

Thank you to Mrs Morris for her bravery in coming to address a crowded meeting so soon after her courageous resignation from St Albion's School.

Mrs Jay gave a vote of thanks, saying only a woman would have the integrity to admit their failings as Estelle had done and that the men in the PCC should take note of her honesty.

Women had better things to do, she said, than be bossed around by the Vicar and that the only reason he had appointed any women at all was to make him look good in the Team Ministry Photograph (signed copies on sale at the Christmas Fayre Nov. 16th).

Unfortunately, Mrs Morris's speech was not very good and she stopped half-way through admitting she didn't have any ideas.

Tea was served by Mrs Jowell.

Millennium Tent Update

■ I know some of you will be disappointed to hear that the superb deal negotiated by Mr Falconer to sell the Millennium Tent to an American businessman for £1.32 has temporarily had to be put on hold. It seems that Mr Slizi Fastbuck, the Chief Executive Officer of Fastbuck Leisure Promotions (Las Vegas), is having to spend a lot of his time in gaol just at present. But I have no doubt that it will all be sorted out in due course.

In the meantime, parishioners are asked not to use the Tent for dumping builders' waste, rubber tyres and mobile phones, since it is now the temporary home of several Slovakian and Romanian families who have come to Britain in the hope of winning the lottery! T.B.

Salve Mr Clarke

WELCOME aboard to Mr Clarke who takes over at the school. Mr Clarke is a "big hitter" – though of course we don't allow that any more – and one of our "big guns" (also banned).

Mr Clarke was at school himself once, which makes him ideally suited to the job. Any boys suggesting he looks like Fungus the Bogeyman will be expelled at once. (And then subsequently reinstated on appeal.) T.B.

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Mr Meacher who sang from the wrong hymn sheet on Sunday and began with an old-fashioned number about the evils of capitalism and inequality. Let him remember that we have changed our tune on this one and that to believe in the power of money is no longer a sin – in fact, it's part of our greed. *(Surely 'Creed'? A.C.)*

JOBS WANTED

"Estelle"

Lady seeks full-time employment.

Anything considered:
Ironing, dog-walking, babysitting.

Estelle says: "I'm a quitter not a fighter"

Downwardly mobile number:

0874 372538

BUSH DECLARES WAR ON PUTIN

by Our Defence Staff **Barbara Armalite**

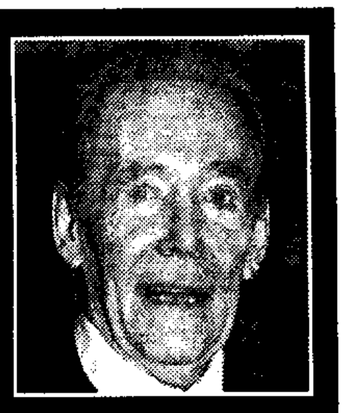
THE WAR against terrorism took a new twist last night when President Dubya Bush called for "regime change" in the Soviet Union to replace the evil Putin.

"He has chemical weapons," said Bush, "which he has used to kill large numbers of his own people."

Theatre of War

The President continued, "How long will it be before Putin uses these gases to put us all to sleep? No, it is time to invade Russia now."

DUMBLEBORE MAN DEAD



by Our Showbiz Staff **Nedwina Twinky** (17)

ONE OF the greatest actors in the Harry Potter film has died today. Richard Harris was best known for his role in the Harry Potter film where he played the Headmaster of Hogwarts, Albertus Dumbledore, for two minutes.

Apparently, he was in some other films and used to do things in the theatre but he will always be remembered as the man with the beard in Lord of the Rings *(cont. p. 94)*

BLAIR BLAMES AL-QAEDA FOR STORMS

by Our Weather Staff **Ulriqaeda Jonsson**

THE FIERCE storms that struck Britain last weekend could well be linked to the notorious terrorist organisation Al-Qaeda it was claimed last night.

A spokesman for the Prime Minister said, "Intelligence reports pointed to rough linkages between the 90mph gales and Osama bin Laden.

"This demonstrates beyond any shadow of a doubt," he said, "that we must invade Iraq at once."

On Other Pages

Militant Firemen: Were they trained in Afghanistan? **94**

The Daily Telegraph

It Should Be Free

A free country

Why should we pay 55p for the Daily Telegraph when it should be given to us for free?

Gone are the days when it was a quality newspaper devoted to the ideals public service and accurate reporting.

Nowadays, alas, the paper has dumbed down, and contains nothing but fashion makeovers, celebrity gossip and repeated photographs of Liz Hurley.

It is no wonder that more and more people are refusing to pay what amounts to a poll tax, a compulsory 55p fee for services they can get elsewhere.

The Human Rights Act exists for exactly such cases where the public should be protected from an unfair and unpopular levy. *(Surely some mistake. C. Black.)*

POLICE NOTICE

If you have been a victim of a serious assault, please contact Max Clifford at once and don't waste time ringing the police.

Those SHERIDAN MORLEY MEMOIRS In Full

Chapter One

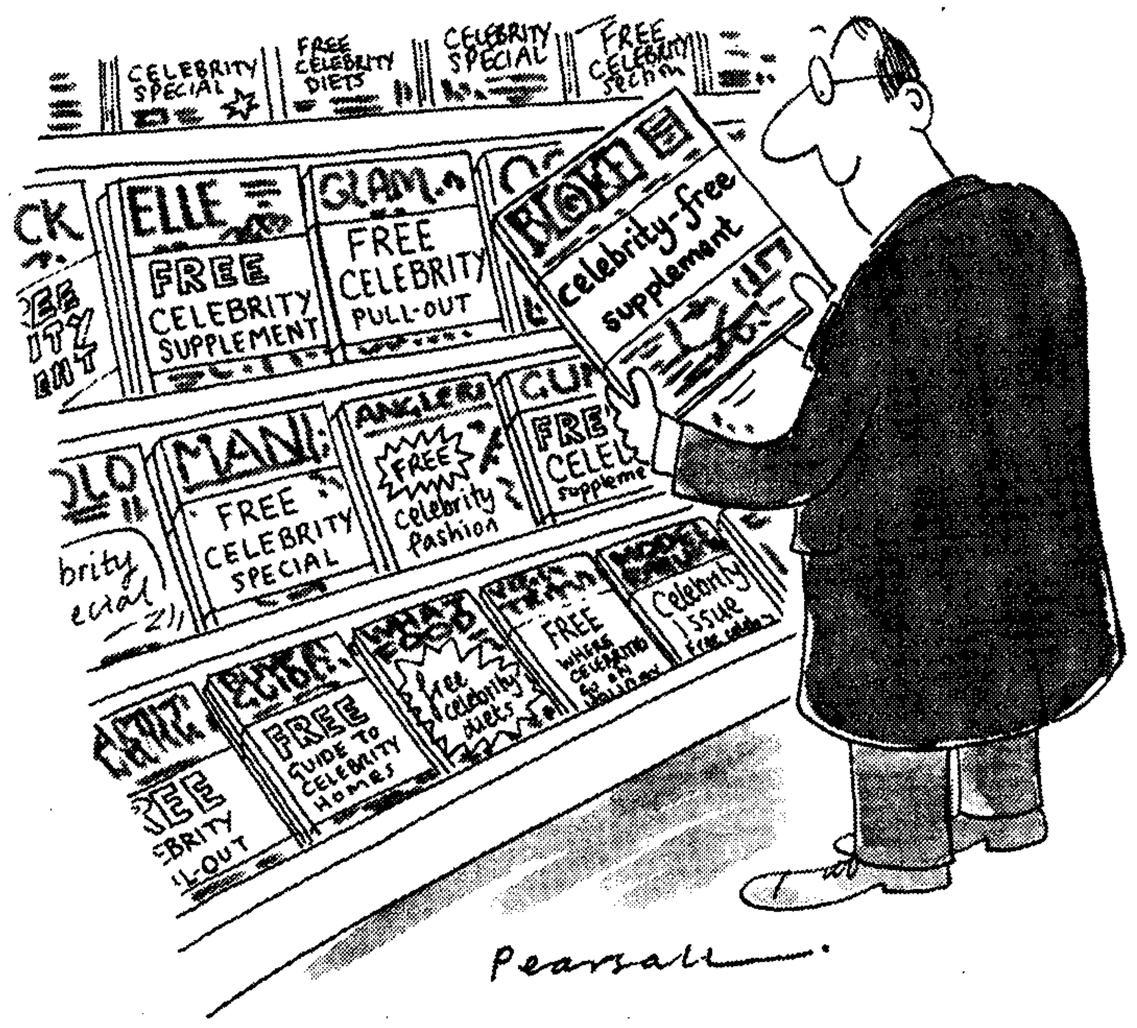
Z-z-z-

MAN ON TELEVISION DIDN'T BEHAVE DISGRACEFULLY

Shock Claim Rocks Nation

by Our TV Staff **Max Publicity**

A TELEVISION presenter faced damaging accusations yesterday that he had behaved like a normal human being. His career is thought to be on the line and TV bosses were holding urgent talks to see if he had any future in the industry. The TV presenter, whose name is well-known in media circles, was said to have enjoyed two-in-a-bed romps with his wife and to have shamelessly picked up his children from school to go on half-term and *(cont. p. 94)*



Nursery Times

News in Brief

GEORGIE PORGIE ACCUSED OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

"HE KISSED me and made me cry," says victim, "and when the boys came out to play I sold my story to the newspapers."

KNAVE DENIES STEALING TARTS FROM THE LATE QUEEN OF HEARTS

THE case continues.

'WE WON'T RESCUE HUMPTY DUMPTY' SAY FIREMEN: KINGS HORSES AND MEN CALLED IN

Obituaries

THE late Mr Dumpty.

TV HIGHLIGHTS

Mr Wright, ITV, Wednesday 9pm

ULRIKA JONSSON hosts the hot new 'date-raping' game show where fifty desperate tabloid hacks compete to be the first to catch the eye of the media by publicly outing John Leslie as Ulrika's alleged attacker.

Eye Rating: Embarrassing

Legal News

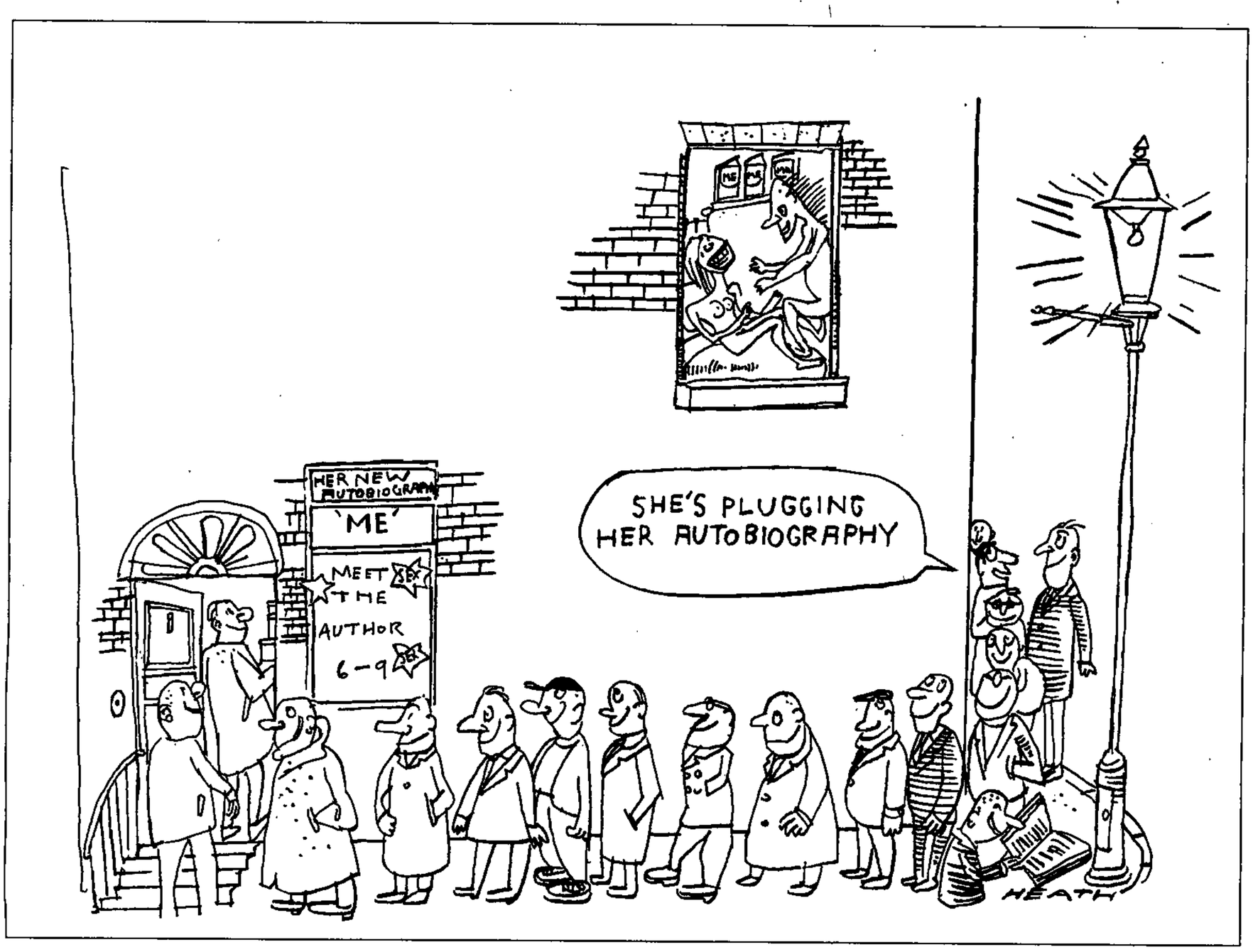
New Fast-Track Legal Process Introduced

by Joshua Rozenberg

A NEW procedure has been enshrined this week in British jurisprudence to deal with the complexities of serious sexual allegations.

It is called "Trial by Levy" and involves the defendant being judged in the Daily Mail by Geoffrey Levy. Levy heads a panel of one and assesses the evidence and character of the defendant before reaching his verdict of "Guilty" in all cases.

Legal experts are unsure if *(cont. p. 94)*



ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

JOHN BIRT

What is your first memory of spoons?

Well, you have to remember that I was born into a very working-class home in Liverpool. We had to look after our spoons, which is why, when I was eight years old, I insisted on taking over the job of sorting out the family spoon collection which, frankly, was in a bit of a mess.

I devised a system involving a recategorisation of the spoons according to their sizes and frequency of use. My grandmother was very impressed and told me that I was the cleverest member of the family and would one day run the BBC.

Did you come across many spoons there?

Far too many, I'm afraid. In fact it was my first job when I became Director-General, to go round the whole organisation and get rid of all the surplus spoons. Of course a lot of people protested. Public school boys mostly, like Marmaduke Hussey, who was the most arrogant and conceited man I ever met. But in the end, I think everyone at the BBC realised what a superb job I had done there, both in terms of spoon management and everything else.

***Your* present job is with the government, isn't it? Does it involve spoons in anyway?**

Yes, I'm leading a think tank for Tony Blair which covers the whole spectrum of spoons – soup spoons, teaspoons, tablespoons, the lot. Can Britain do better, spoonwise? That's the question Tony has asked me to solve. "You're the only man who can do it, John," he told me. "You saved the BBC, now can you save Britain?"

Are you making it up?

How dare you ask that question? I hate sloppy journalism. It's one of the things I've always fought against. You have to know the story before you write it. And my story is that I am terrifically brilliant at everything I do and I am also probably the most humble person in the world.

Has anything interesting ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

No. Of course not.

NEXT WEEK: Stephen Glover – *"Me and My Gloves."*

LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND SLAMS DAILY MAIL HANDOUTS

by Our Lottery Correspondent **Lunchtime O'Ballz**

THE LOTTERY Community Fund today slammed as disgraceful and totally unjustified massive hand-outs from the Daily Mail to certain undesirable individuals.

"How can they morally defend handing over huge payments to the likes of Ulrika Jonsson, Cheryl Barrymore, Edwina Currie and Jeffrey Archer?" said the Community Fund chairman Lady Brittan.

"They're squandering their shareholders' hard-earned money on people who have never done a single thing to enhance our way of life in Britain."

However, the Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre defended the payments, saying just because these people were widely seen by most hard-working asylum-seekers to be scrounging lay-abouts doesn't mean they aren't deserving of the cash.

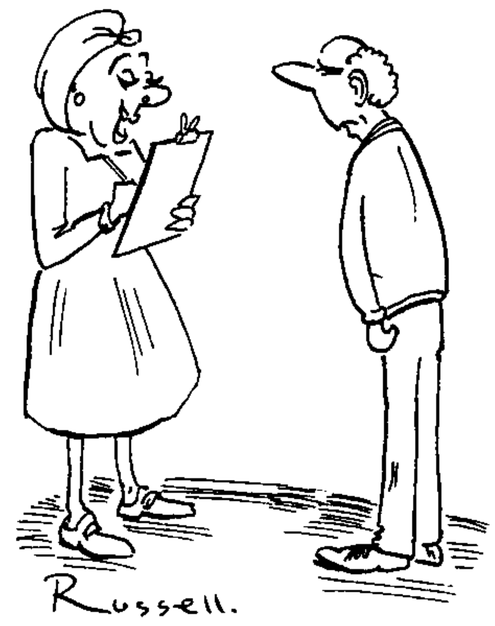
CRICKET SPECIAL

ASHES COUNTDOWN SPECIAL:

CAN ENGLAND TURN BACK THE CLOCK AND DEFEAT THE MIGHTY AUSTRALIANS IN THEIR OWN BACKYARD?

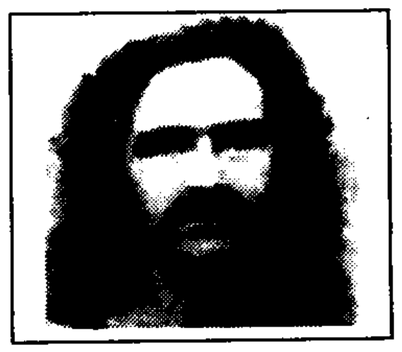
No

"What is your opinion of the number of canvassers in this shopping precinct: are there too many, too few or just enough?"



SPECIAL BRANCH NAMES SPART AS UNDERCOVER AGENT

by Our History Staff **A.J.P. Tinker-Taylor**



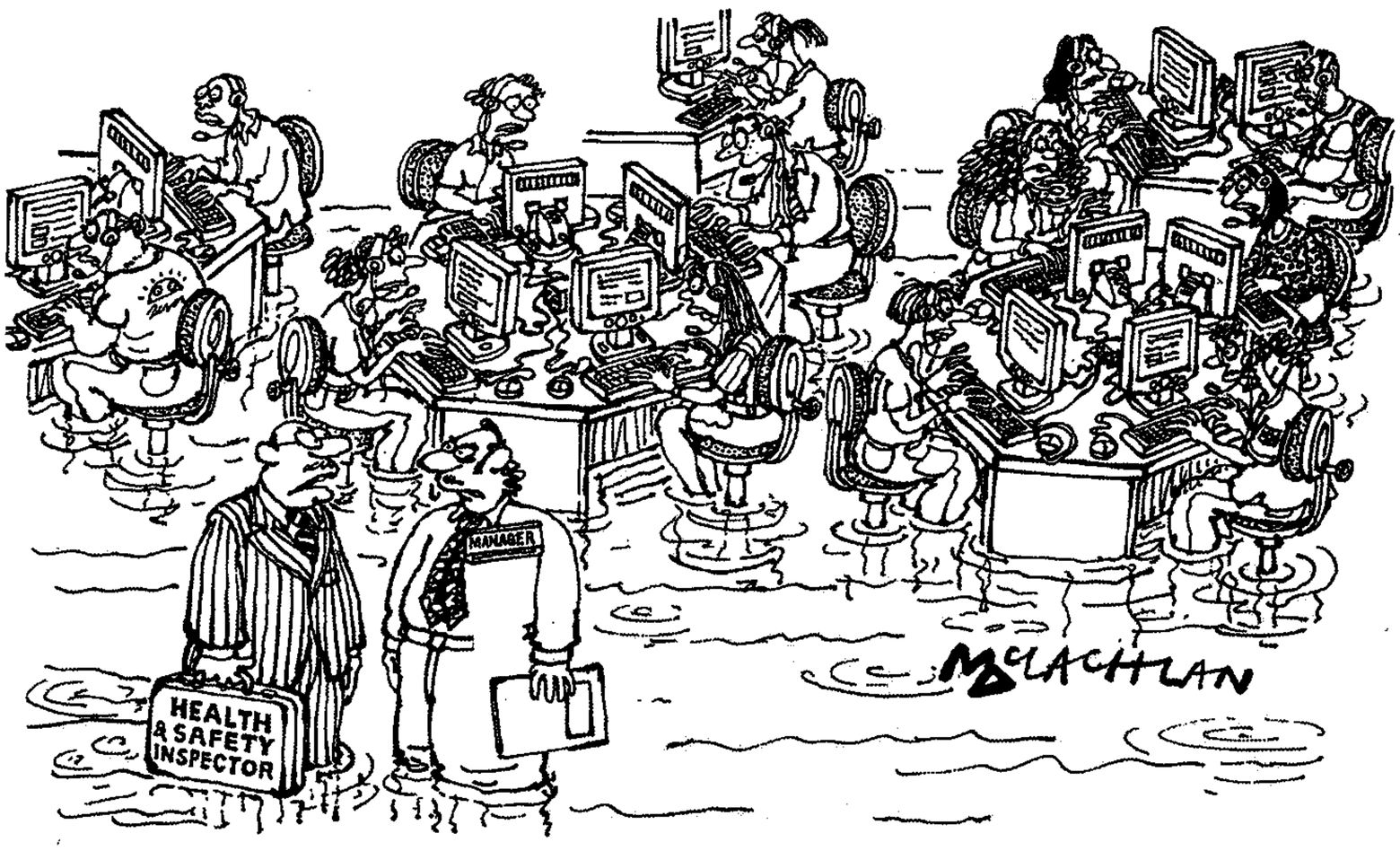
THE legendary left-wing activist Dave Spart, general secretary of the National Union of Protest Operatives (formerly NUPO and now to be known as ACCENTURE), has been exposed as a police informer.

Whilst some surprise was expressed that Union leaders like Joe Gormley and Ray Buckton were intelligence "sleepers", the idea that militant firebrand Spart was in the pay of the British Government has sent shock waves through the entire Socialist movement.

Said Spart last night, "Er... er... basically... it's a fair cop... as am I, er..."

Meanwhile, the Spart revelation has provoked speculation that there are other big names on the list.

Said Inspector George 'Smiley of the Circus' Knacker, "I cannot comment on this, as it is top secret, but I can confirm that Joseph Stalin, Leon Trotsky, Che Guevara and Karl Marx were all working for Her Majesty's Government."



"It has come to our attention that employees at this call centre are not allowed to leave their seats, even to go to the lavatories."

'NASTY' COUGH GETS BETTER

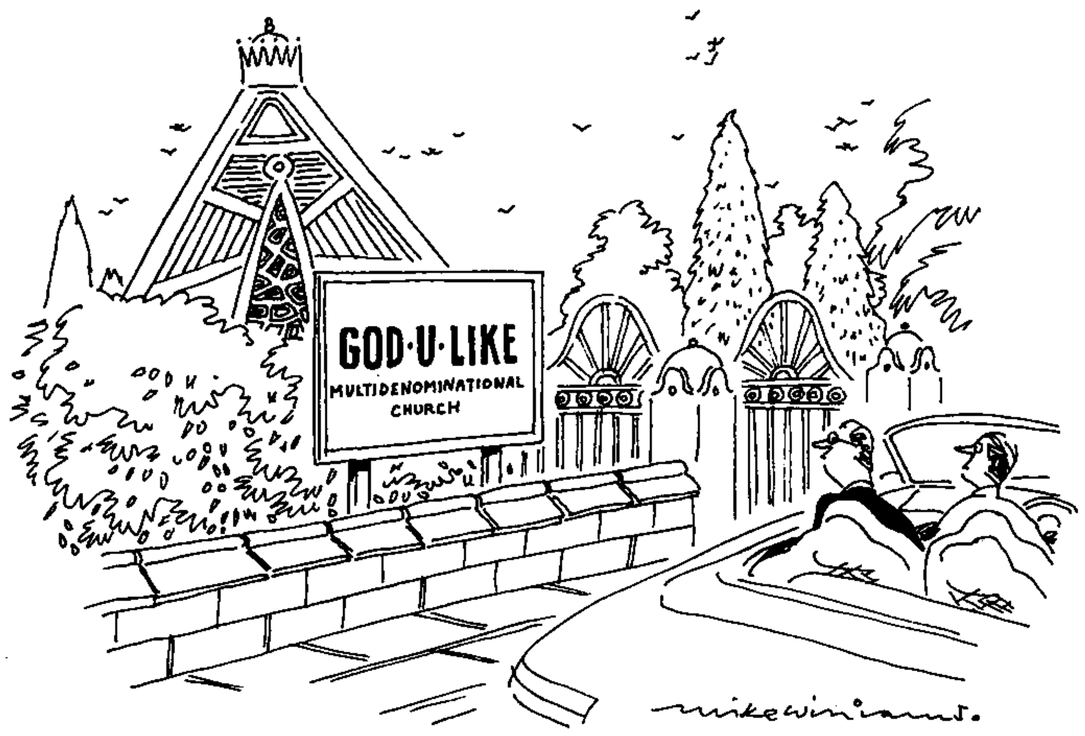
by Our Political Staff **Vic Vapour-Rub**

TORY MPs were overjoyed yesterday to see a dramatic improvement in their party's fortunes when leader Iain Duncan Cough, the self-styled 'Quiet Man' of British politics, managed to remain silent throughout Prime Minister's Question Time.

"It was a tour de force," said one exultant back-bencher. "Mr Blair kept on provoking him, but Iain just sat there saying nothing.

"Had he opened his mouth," the MP went on, "he might well have made a fool of himself. As it was, he forced Blair to keep talking uninterrupted all afternoon."

THAT COUGH SPEECH IN FULL



NEW SCANDAL ENGULFS BORIS SPECKER

by Our Tennis Staff **Luke O'Zade**

BLOND 38-year-old former darling of the Centre-Right Boris Specker today faced new allegations concerning his private life, when it was alleged that he had once played mixed doubles with the notorious East European-born temptress Petroushka Wyfrontikova *(cont. p. 94)*

AN APOLOGY Gordon Brown

IN COMMON with all other newspapers we may have given the impression that Mr Gordon Brown was the most capable Chancellor of the Exchequer in history, who had single-handedly put an end to the boom-and-bust disasters of former years and built up such a gigantic financial surplus that he could afford to hand out billions of pounds to schools and hospitals and still have plenty left over. Headlines such as 'Super-Gordon Does It Again', 'Cash Gordon Saves The World" and 'Brown Puts UK In The Black', may have led readers to believe that we in some way entertained the notion that Mr Brown was a financial genius of the highest order.

We now realise that Mr Brown is in fact little more than a financial nincompoop who has somehow managed to get his sums wrong to the tune of a staggering £7 billion and that his public spending plans are therefore headed for total disaster. We are happy to put the record straight and to apologise unreservedly to Mr Brown for having suggested that he had the slightest idea what he was up to.

HITLER KNIGHTED

by Our Court Staff **Lady Antonia Holden**

THE QUEEN looked startled yesterday when she was asked to confer a knighthood on the late Adolf Hitler, at her Buckingham Palace investitute ceremony.

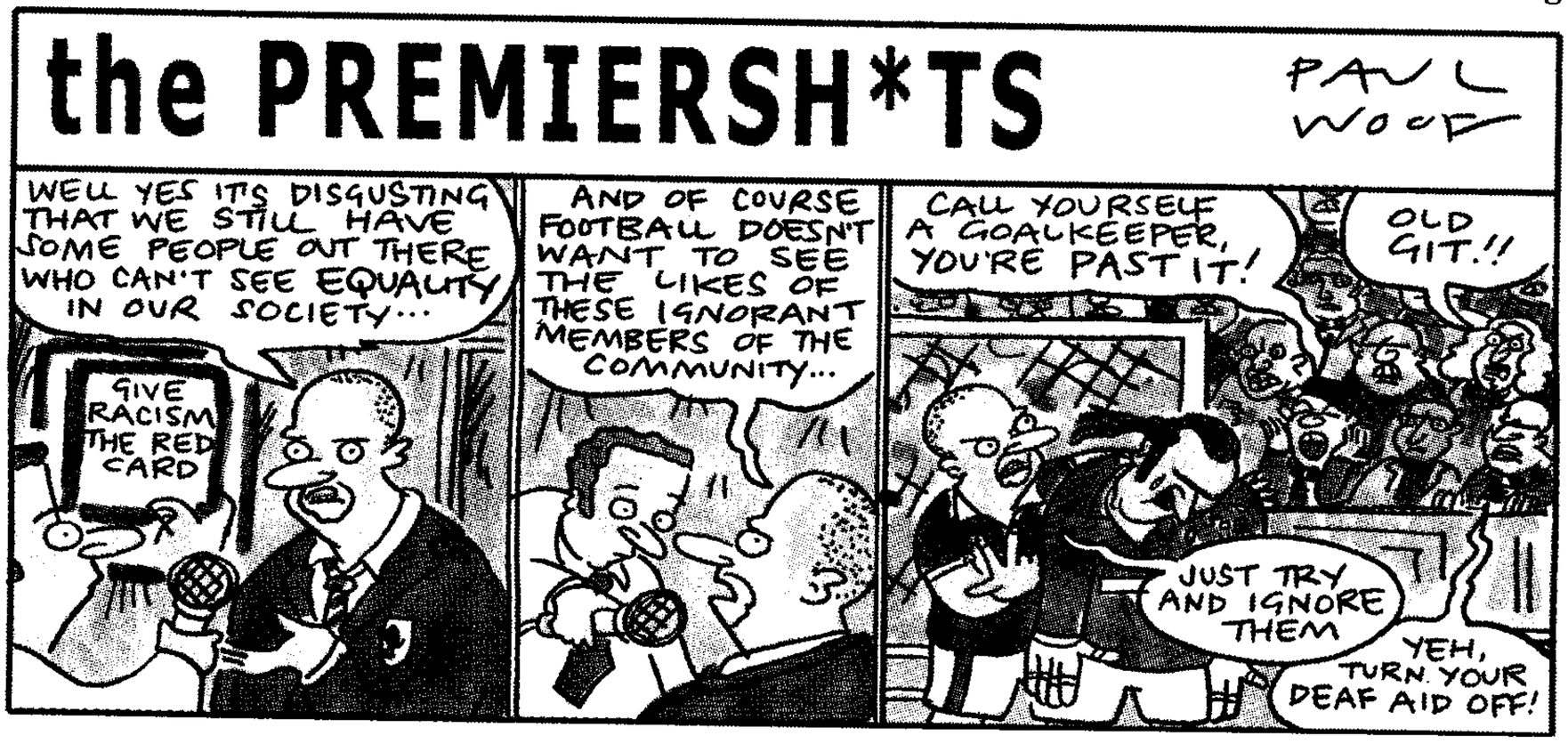
Quickly recovering her composure, she asked the smiling Führer whether he was still editing the Evening Standard, his retirement job after resigning as Chancellor of Germany.

"Nein," joked the irrepressible countryman and best-selling author. "My greatest pleasure now is shooting peasants!"

Sir Max Hitler is 112.

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOF


WELL YES IT'S DISGUSTING THAT WE STILL HAVE SOME PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO CAN'T SEE EQUALITY IN OUR SOCIETY...
GIVE RACISM THE RED CARD
AND OF COURSE FOOTBALL DOESN'T WANT TO SEE THE LIKES OF THESE IGNORANT MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY...
CALL YOURSELF A GOALKEEPER, YOU'RE PAST IT!
OLD GIT.!!
JUST TRY AND IGNORE THEM
YEH, TURN YOUR DEAF AID OFF!

Passengers to wait 10 years for fast trains

The Times

Twenty years ago we had our own vicar, a church hall and a vicarage, all now sold. *Independent*

PRIVATE EYE'S TOP TEN BRITONS

■ A NATIONWIDE poll of our readers reveals for the first time the ten greatest Britons who ever lived. Now the case for each of them is argued by one of the Eye's top columnists.

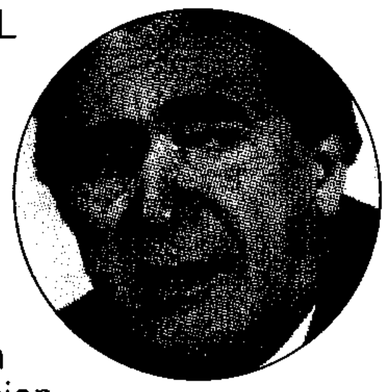
PRINCESS DIANA

by Polly Filler

1 SAINT DIANA was the greatest feminist icon of all time. She not only changed Britain for ever. She had the most wonderful dress sense and looked good in photographs – like me.

ROBERT MAXWELL

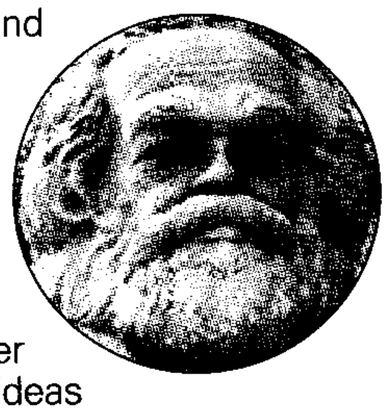
by Lord Gnome



2 BOB MAXWELL was a towering genius who revolutionised the British press. He alone came up with the ground-breaking financial strategy of stealing money from the newspaper pension fund. If he had a weakness, it was his failure to learn to swim.

KARL MARX

by Dave Spart



3 ONLY a racist and xenophobe would disqualify Marx on the Little Englander grounds that he was German... er... he was the greatest philosopher who ever lived and if only his ideas had been put into practice the world would... er...

DAVID BECKHAM

by Glenda Slagg

4 MMMMM, don't-chajustlovehim? With his little-boy smile and beefcake body, he's the Number One Hunk of all time. Hats (and everything else!) off to the man who's got us all United (geddit?!?!)

JOHN LENNON

by E.J. Thribb*

5 LENNON was the greatest poet who ever lived. When he died, I wrote the following tribute, which says it all:

So. Farewell then John Lennon.

Imagine there's no Heaven.

That was your Catchphrase.

And now you don't Have to imagine it Any more.

* E.J. Thribb is sponsored by Lemsip

IAIN DUNCAN SMITH

by Peter O'Bore

6 IAIN is the quiet man of British politics. His towering strengths have not yet shown themselves. But when they do, he will prove himself an even greater Briton than Churchill, Gladstone, Disraeli and Queen Elizabeth the First.

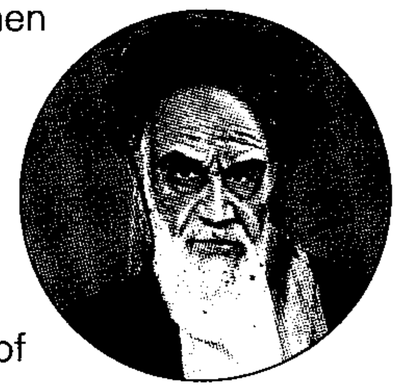
DAME BARBARA CARTLAND

by Sylvie Krin

7 AS THE first rays of soft autumn sunshine steal over my word processor, my thoughts inevitably turn to the greatest writer this sceptred isle has ever produced. I refer of course to that supreme chronicler of the human heart *(That's enough. Ed.)*

THE AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI

by The Rev. J.C. Flannel



8 AT A TIME when we are all becoming more aware of each other's faiths in the multi-cultural society that is Britain today, surely the greatest Briton of all must be the late Ayatollah Khomeini. His message of peace and universal brotherhood still speaks to us today, whatever our colour, creed or sexual orientation.

LORD JENKINS

by Roy Jenkins

9 FAR BE IT from me to blow my own twumpet, an always unattwactive twait in any chwonicler of the passing pawade of our pwoud histowy. Yet when I consider my own mewits, albeit weluctantly, I am forced to conclude that, as a statesman, wwiter, histowian and, may I say, connoisseur of clawet, my claims to be considered as the gweatest Bwiton of all are by no means inconsidewable.

PHIL MITCHELL

by Phil Space

10 NO LIST of the greatest Britons in history would be complete without the bulldog presence of the greatest Briton who ever lived – Phil Mitchell from *EastEnders*. It was his unflinching courage in the dark days of 1940 which *(cont'd p. 94)*

THAT GREAT BRITONS LIST IN FULL

(continued from page 1)

87 P.J. Proby
88 William Shakespeare
89 Sir Richard Branson
90 Boadicea
91 Charlie Dimmock
92 Tony Blackburn
93 Janet Reger
94 Henry VIII
95 David Jason
96 Sylvia Pankhurst
97 Rabbi Lionel Blue
98 Rolf Harris
99 J.M.W. Turner
100 Dr Harold Shipman

IN THE COURTS

What The Butler Stole

Regina v. The Butler
Day 94

Before Mr Justice Cocklecarrot

Lord Carpark Q.C. *(for Mr Paul Butler)*: I now call Inspector 'Knacker of the Yard' Knacker to help me with my enquiries.

Knacker: Evenin' all.

Carpark: Inspector, I gather you have a list of all the items formerly the property of the late Diana, Princess of Wales, which were discovered in the loft space of 312 Stalegrass Crescent, Sydenham, being the dwelling place of the accused, my client Mr Burglar. Would you care to read it to the court?

Knacker: Item one: a gold-plated toast-rack, inscribed "A wedding present from His Highness the Emir of Abu Fribi". Item two: one pair black lycra bikini briefs, designed by Takicoki. Item three: a model VC10 airliner in the livery of Sabena Airlines, with legend "Thank you for flying Sabena". Item four: one midnight blue sequinned cocktail dress by Sushi. Item five: an autographed copy of Michael Barrymore's "My Story", inscribed "Princesses say the funniest things!" Item six: gold signet ring, bearing family crest of the Hewitt family...

Cocklecarrot: Inspector, I must stop you there, and ask everyone present to strike your last sentence from their memories. It would be a very grave breach of national security if it were known that this ring had been the property of Major James Hewitt, the one-time lover of the late Princess. Were this fact to become public, it would cause very deep distress to Her Royal Highness's family who until now have remained happily oblivious of this unfortunate episode.

(The court then adjourned to allow journalists to rush out to phone the newsdesk on their mobiles. The case resumed the next morning when Sir Ephraim Hugefee, for the Crown, cross-examined WPC de Bummer)

Hugefee: I would ask you now to tell the court what you saw in the loft of the accused.

De Bummer: I did not see anything, your honour.

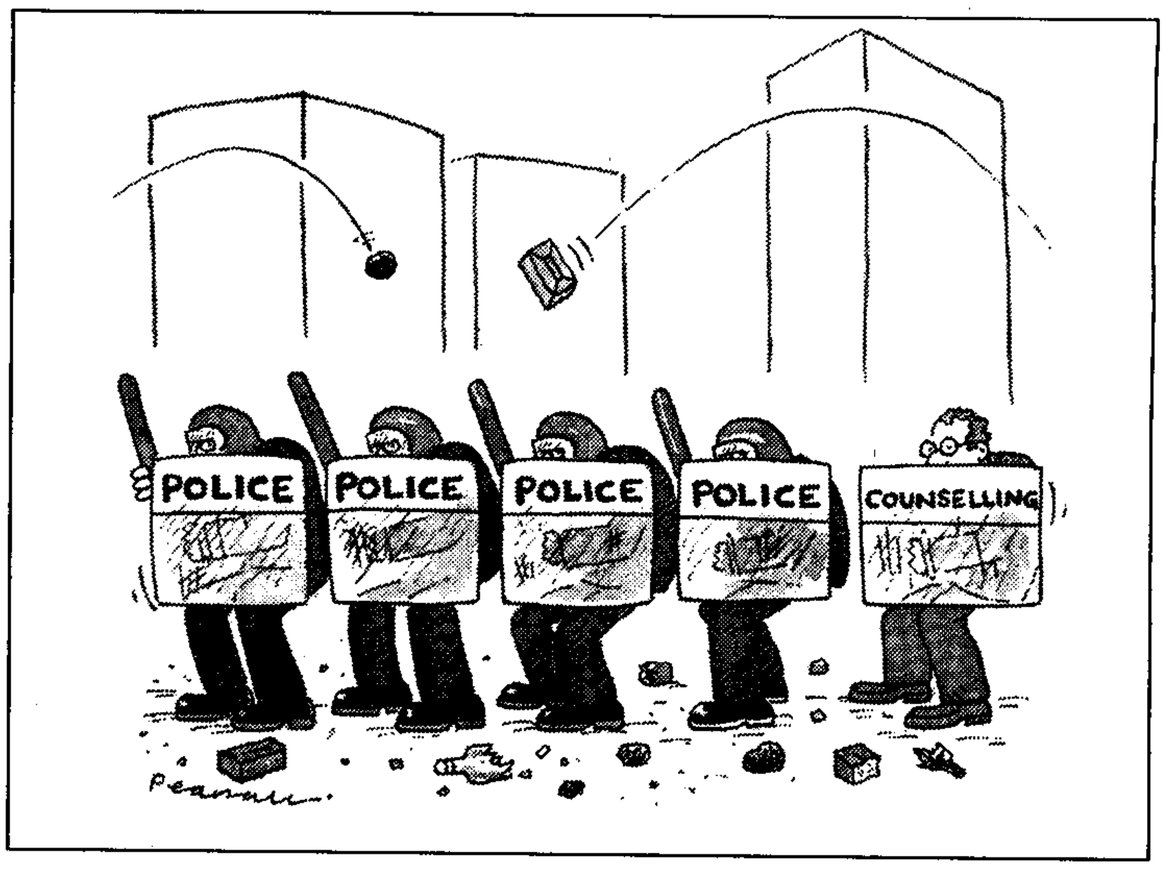
Hugefee *(visibly disconcerted)*: Why not?

De Bummer: Because I did not climb into the loft owing to my suffering from a severe case of vertigo.

Mr Justice Cocklecarrot: In that case, the witness may sit down!

Hugefee: Very amusing, Your Honour. Could I then ask the witness to imagine what she might have seen in the loft, had she ventured into that space?

De Bummer: It was a veritable Aladdin's cave, Your Honour, I would imagine. The Princess's things were scattered everywhere, amounting to a haul estimated at a street value of over £100 million.



Lord Carpark: I object, Your Honour. On her own admission, Mrs de Bumfreezer is making it up as she goes along.

Cocklecarrot: That is as maybe, Mr Carpark. I shall be the judge of that!

Carpark: I am greatly indebted to you, My Lord, for that very amusing contribution.

Cocklecarrot: I think we should adjourn for lunch. It is almost 11 o'clock.

(The case resumed the next day when the accused was asked to describe to the court when he had first developed his obsession with putting on the Princess's dresses)

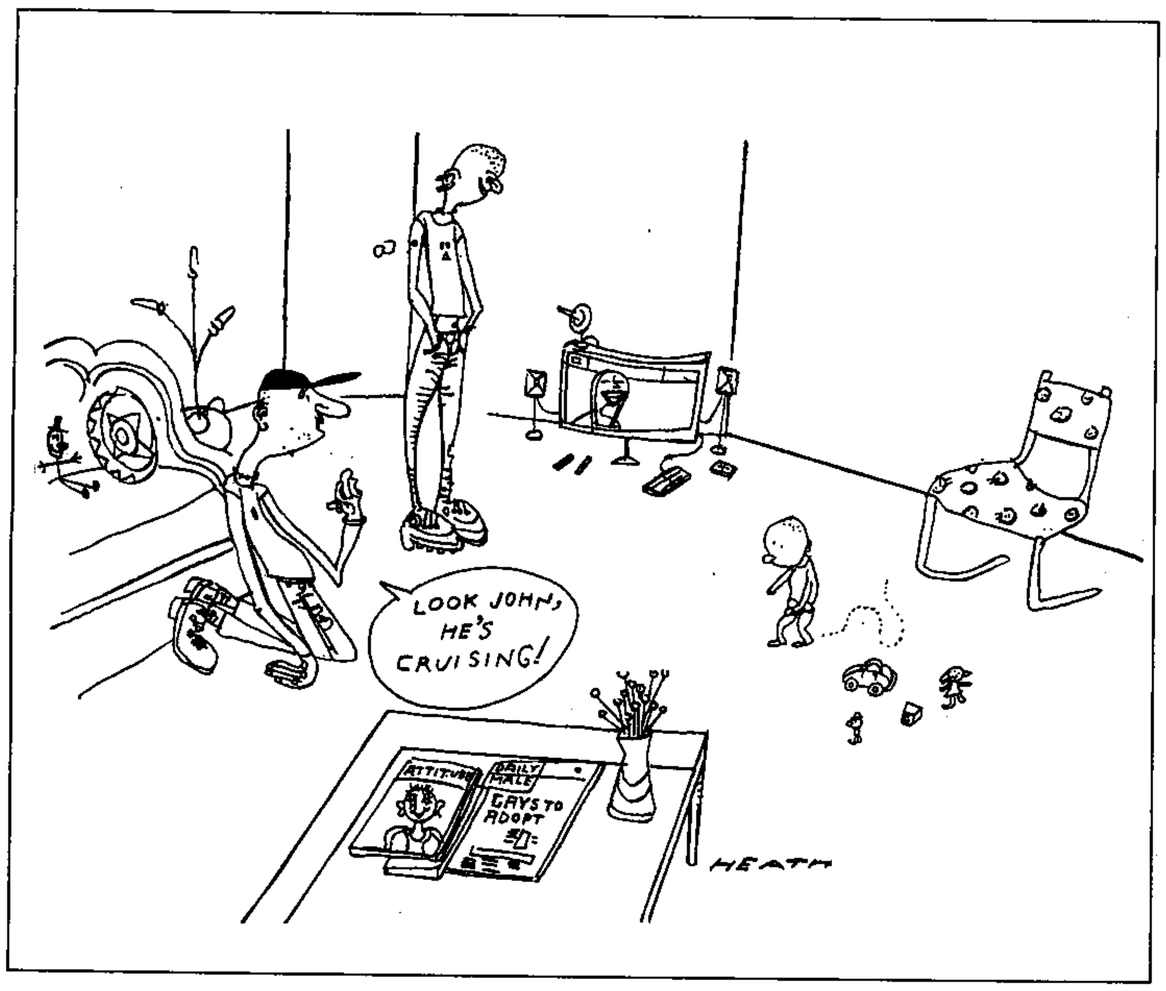
Sir Hugefee: Mr Poofter, may I suggest that you gained an illicit sexual thrill by dancing around in Princess Diana's mini-skirts?

Butler: That is not true.

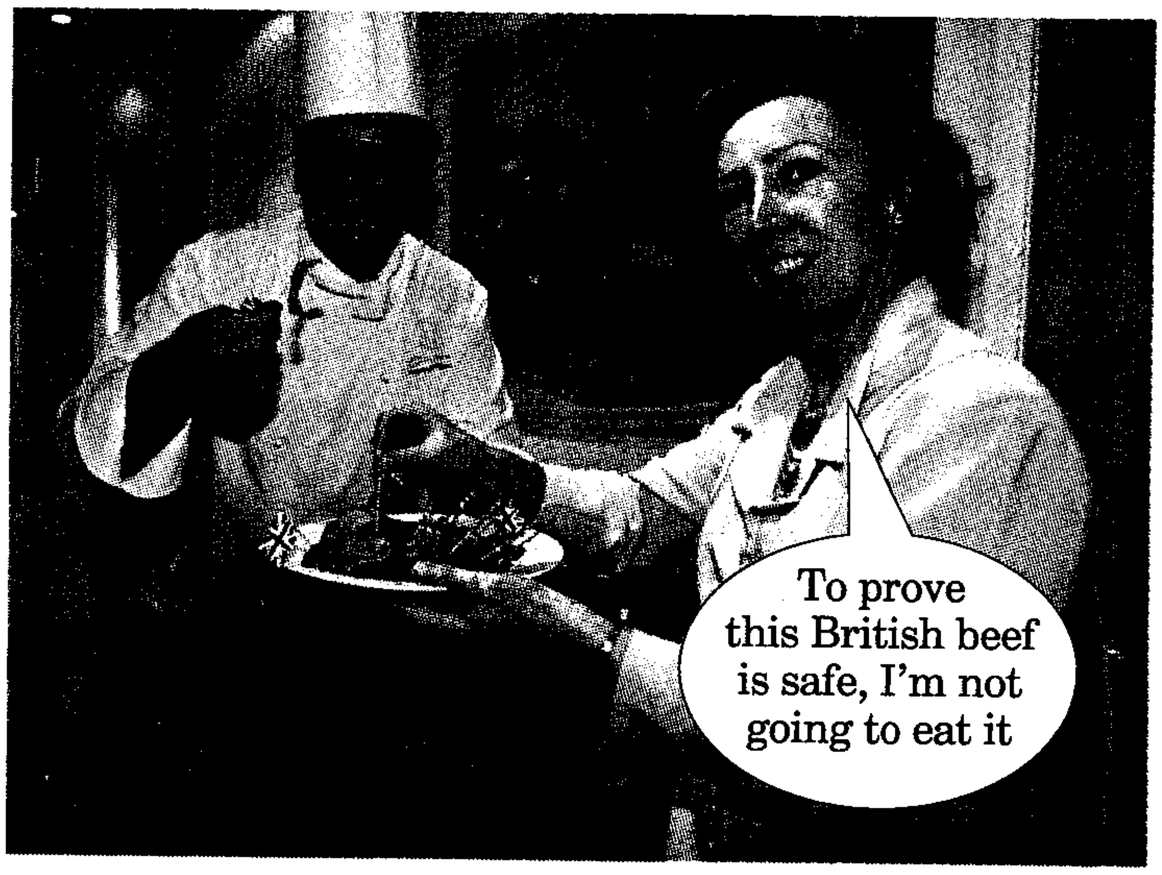
Hugefee: I draw your attention to this letter, written by Inspector Knacker to His Royal Highness the Prince of Charles: *"Dear Your Royal Highness, Knacker of the Yard here. You will be pleased to know that we have got our man, bang to rights. What is more, in my humble opinion, he is a bit of a cross-dresser, which will do our cause no harm at all in front of the idiot judge who will be in charge. It is true that we have no evidence for this, as yet, but we live in hope, know what I mean, nudge, nudge, wink, wink."*

Cocklecarrot: Sir Ephraim, I must stop you there and ask the court to strike the contents of this alleged letter from their memory, particularly the passage referring to the judge as an idiot. This is without question the very gravest and least-founded allegation I have ever heard put to a court of law, and could very well be a sufficient scandalum magnatum to merit my sentencing someone to death.

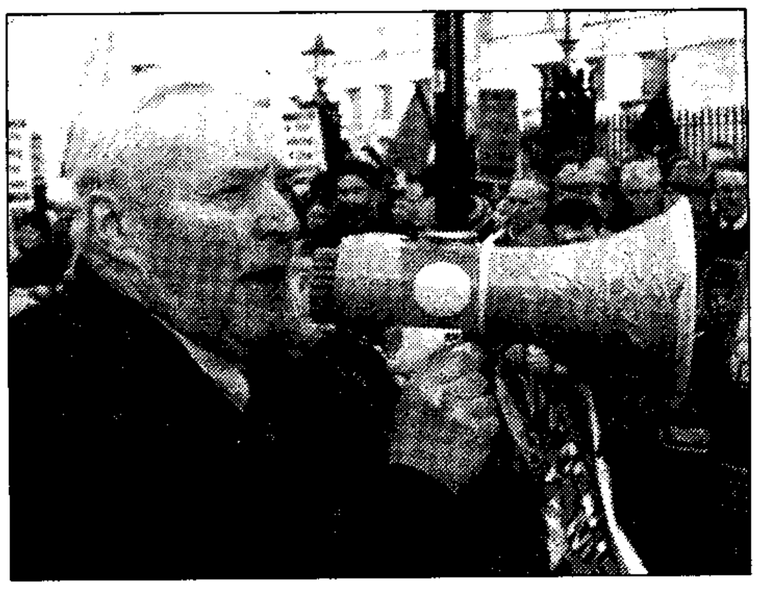
(The case which no one understands continues tomorrow when the court will hear the evidence of the Bishop of Beard and Glasses, who will testify that he has no idea what's going on either)



'MAD COW' LATEST



DIARY



TONY BENN

Sunday: Quite terrifying, really. I am woken by my wireless alarm clock, only to discover from the so-called newscaster that while I was asleep the Government has altered the time by an hour or more. Now they expect us to believe that 8 is really 7, that 6 is really 5, and so on.

It makes me absolutely sick. What an untrustworthy man Blair really is. Of course, the Establishment have always wanted it darker in the night, just so's ordinary decent working people will lose their bearings and trip up on kerbs, or walk slap into walls.

I expect the candle manufacturers put them up to it. And the more candles we have, the more likelihood there is of fire, causing a great many homes to burn down. Don't try and tell me the big guns of the construction industry haven't put Blair up to it.

Monday: I order a cab. "Hello," I say as I get in, "I'm Tony Benn." He looks me in the face, and the penny drops. "Golly gosh," he says, "You're Mr Tony Benn. Blow me down!" Without any sort of prompting, he has recognised me. I am tickled pink.

We engage in a tremendously stimulating discussion.

He tells me that the junction of Kensington High Street and Kensington Church Street has been blocked for three weeks now, due to roadworks. "I don't know what this country's coming to," he concludes.

I explain that the Establishment doesn't want the traffic to go any faster, because that would totally undermine the Government's secret time-changes yesterday, which were designed to remove an hour from ordinary people's lives. "You can tell M15 are behind most of these so called 'road-works'," I explain. "You can recognise them by their shiny yellow jackets and hard helmets."

"You should be Prime Minister," he says, as I pay the fare. What a fascinating discussion we have had, offering me much food for thought.

I take out a Polo Mint and put it in my ear. But I can't get a signal. Frankly, I'm beginning to suspect it is being deliberately jammed.

Tuesday: Now I hear that the brave Firefighters, lovely, decent lads, are going on strike to try and stop this whole ghastly business of the government's secret time-changes.

I pop into the local home furnishings store, march up to the bedding counter and ask for some Polos. They say they sell pillows, not Polos, and they show me one. "Well, I'll never be able to fit something that size in my ear!" I exclaim. What a bunch of proper charlies!

Eventually, I locate some Polo Mints at the sweet shop next door. "Do they come with batteries?" I ask, but it turns out these are extra, like so many things these days. So blow me down if they haven't even privatised Polo Mints! I have no wish to bring personalities into it, that's not my style, never has been, never will be, but I place the blame fairly and squarely on that that smarmy, self-satisfied, grinning lickspittle Tony Blair.

The Education Secretary, Estelle Morris, on the television set at lunchtime. A bit effeminate, but forceful. It's quite obvious the Establishment is grooming him to take over from Blair in the next year or two. He'll be made Home Secretary next, then Chancellor. Talk of an impending resignation is pure misinformation.

Wednesday: Lovely note this morning from the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. What a super guy. He congratulated me on all my years in Parliament, and wished me well. He really is first-class, whatever the others might say, the great Labour leader since Attlee, who I frankly never liked. "We may have had our differences in the past," I reply. "But I still have a great affection for you. Yours ever, Tony."

To distract attention from the mess they're making in Iraq, the Bush administration has sent its own hit-man to Washington, and he's now picking ordinary citizens off on direct orders from the White House. And of course all this Ulrika Jonsson to-do is part-and-parcel of the same thing. Don't tell me she's not an undercover MI5 operative: former TV-am weathercasters always are, in my experience.

Thursday: Tea with Martin McGuinness. Lovely man. Really super warm smile. Wouldn't hurt a fly. "I frankly deplore the way this Government allows its media to describe you as a terrorist, Martin," I say, pouring him another cuppa. I can't help but notice he's fiddling with something. "What's that you've got there, Martin?" I ask, with a chuckle.

"It's a fly, Tony," he replies with that lovely Irish lilt of his. "I'm just pulling its wings off. For its own good, of course."

"Quite!" I say. "It's probably sick to death of all that flying nonsense. They work them far too hard. Needs a well-earned rest, eh?"

Having finished pulling the wings off, Martin kindly squashes the fly flat as a pancake, "to put it out of its misery". What a really super, kindly chap he is. A tear comes into my eye when I think of this great act of kindness he has performed on a little fly.

"No life for a fly, without wings," I say, reassuringly, and we hug one another.

Early Christmas card from Augusto Pinochet, "to the best Leader the Labour Party never had!" I'm tickled pink, obviously. Very sweet of him. What a nice old man he really is. In the past, we had our differences, but I now feel a very real affection for the guy. So much more genuine than that dreadful little phony Tony Blair, for instance.

Friday: Now that I've left the Commons, I can begin to engage in real politics! This morning, I was out in the garden with m'bricks and m'cement, attempting to rebuild the Berlin Wall, which is still greatly missed. The Cold War was, let's face it, a war against socialism – and it's not a war I intend to lose. Early days yet, of course, but I plan to take the wall from Holland Park, through Oxford Circus, across the Channel to Hamburg, on to Berlin, then all the way through to China. I'll have to keep an eye open for Jonsson and her sniper friends, of course – but with Inspector Morse on our side and a fresh packet of Polo Mints in our pocket, believe me, there'll be no stopping us.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

WELL! SUPER EVENING. I DO LIKE A NICE NIGHT OUT IN SOHO.
SHALL I GET THIS?
NO, NO. LEAVE IT TO ME.
LET ME PICK UP THE TAB, OKAY?
WELL, IF YOU'RE SURE...
YEAH
OH NO! IT'S ONLY A BLOODY SMARTIE. DRAT!
UGH! SOMEBODY'S KID MUST HAVE DROPPED IT!
BILL

Literary Review

Howard's Way

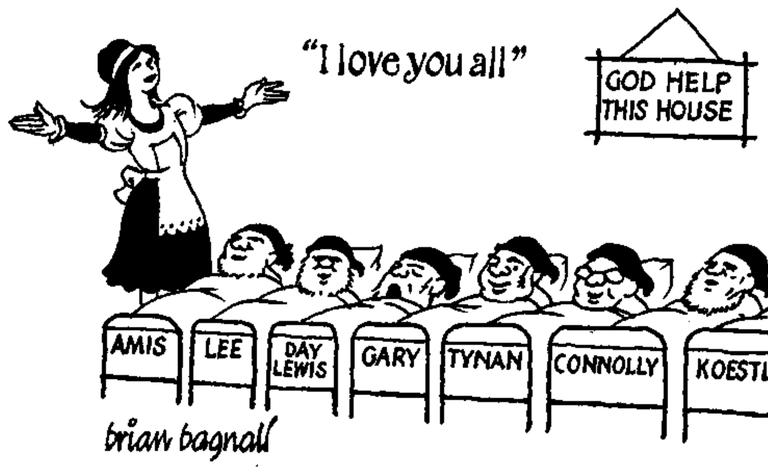
Slipstream
Elizabeth Jane Howard
(Macmillan, £20)

IF you were writing a comic novel about an absurd literary couple, you couldn't make up a better one: a lower-middle-class author, as famous for his irascibility as his unpopular political views, married to a posh blonde with three names and a long string of well-known lovers who writes drippy books about women and has edited an anthology about Lurv. And don't think for a minute Lady Antonia Fraser doesn't have three names. Omit the first when you address her, and her left-wing firebrand husband will take your head off.

Before this wonderful couple came into being, however, another answering to the same description were almost as prominent in the 60s and 70s as the Fraser-Pinters were to be in the 80s and 90s. The novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard, after bedding Arthur Koestler, Cyril Connolly, Kenneth Tynan, Romain Gary, Cecil Day-Lewis and Laurie Lee, married Kingsley Amis. These historic matings are, of course, the major interest of Howard's memoirs, but, by God, you've go to wait for them.

Though Howard says she could always make people laugh, her autobiography gives no more evidence of her well-known delicious sense of fun than her novels about how women are Misunderstood and Suffer. But we get plenty of evidence of her ego. Again, like so many authors who say they've always felt unworthy and insignificant, Howard is sure a waiting world longs to hear about her imaginary playmates, her time at domestic-science school, her pet tortoise and her pet cat.

Every family holiday is recorded, and what seems like every meal she ate; but all these memories are merely stated, rather than evoked with any precision or sensuality. Later in life she continues to empty her diary, recording her lunch dates and weekend visits and trips abroad with such memorable remarks as: "It was the best tomato salad I had ever eaten." Less happy memories are those of her health problems, which, by the end of the book, include piles and colonic irrigation, which "took half an hour, but meant that one was trouble free for twenty-four hours."



Howard seems to have forgotten nearly all the amusing and interesting things her writer lovers said, but she remembers their testimonials. Koestler, the day after they meet and go to bed: "I have decided that we should get married, darling." Gary: "He said he'd been madly in love with me since the first moment he saw me." Tynan: "He did love me, he went on to say, but I was too splendid for him." Lee, years after their affair: "I still think of you with rapture."

Her stepmother's former lover and her own psychiatrist say they're desperately in love with her, and another doctor says he won't see her "because I should fall in love with you." Howard has to quote them to give an idea of what she was like when young because she finds writing about her appearance "embarrassing and difficult".

A distinctive feature of *Slipstream* is a "Cast of Characters" at the front of the book with descriptions of some people she only mentions by name within it. So when she mentions, for instance, Elaine Dundy or Lesley Blanch, you can turn to the cast list to find that she was sleeping with men who were not only quite distinguished but who also had accomplished wives. Unaccountably she omits in the listing "had an affair with Kingsley Amis".

Howard's description of what she has learned in psychoanalysis confirms, as such descriptions usually do, the author's self-importance and self-deception. "I could see my faults and weaknesses more clearly and could forgive them," she says, among them her "neediness". But she doesn't seem to have figured out yet that "needy" is another word for "greedy", that needy people are bullies who demand attention and concessions because, you see, they're so very weak.

Thus Howard graciously concedes that, though her daughter was very unpleasant and difficult, she must bear the blame for the poor relationship with the child she rejected and neglected because she is "older". When her therapist has a death in the family and can no longer see her, although she feels "lost and abandoned", she allows that the therapist is worse off.

Perhaps the biggest of the unintentional laughs in this story of mournful narcissism is Howard's delight when Amis read one of her novels for the first time and pronounced it "very good". Anyone even slightly familiar with Amis's antic and witty writing might think it one of the few moments of tact in his life, but not Howard. The deception, though, was mutual: Howard now tells us, in a rare moment of frankness about her sex life, that she faked her orgasms.

Flop, idle

Right from the Start
Gareth Gates
(Virgin Books, £9.99)

DIVERTING though the arguments over the Booker may have been for those who still believe literary merit and bookselling are in any way connected, a look at the bestseller lists should be top of the reading list for next year's judges.

And how long before television produces *Book Idol*, in which the three people in Britain who still have pretensions to literary grandeur will be painstakingly whittled down to one over 52 weeks, and the public will vote for none of them and elect Andy McNab president instead? It might at least alert the literati that the dumbing-down debate is whistling in the wind. The books most people actually read are already so dumb they'll soon be coming with instruction manuals. *Pace* Lisa Jardine; what the public really wants is annotated photo albums of faces off the telly.

Hence Gareth Gates's autobiography. Anyone who has taken an interest in his short career will know that Gareth is a very young pop singer who was a nobody until he came second on *Pop Idol*, a contrived ITV ratings winner in which he was a cherubic, stuttering pawn. His "story so far", therefore, reads, "Nobody. Pop Idol (2nd). Watch this space."

But if the public can stomach, or indeed embrace, two Geri Halliwell autobiographies in two years (between which the update was "became androgynous; took up yoga") they will indeed be rushing to the shops to pick up the life-story of an 18 year old who can at least sing.

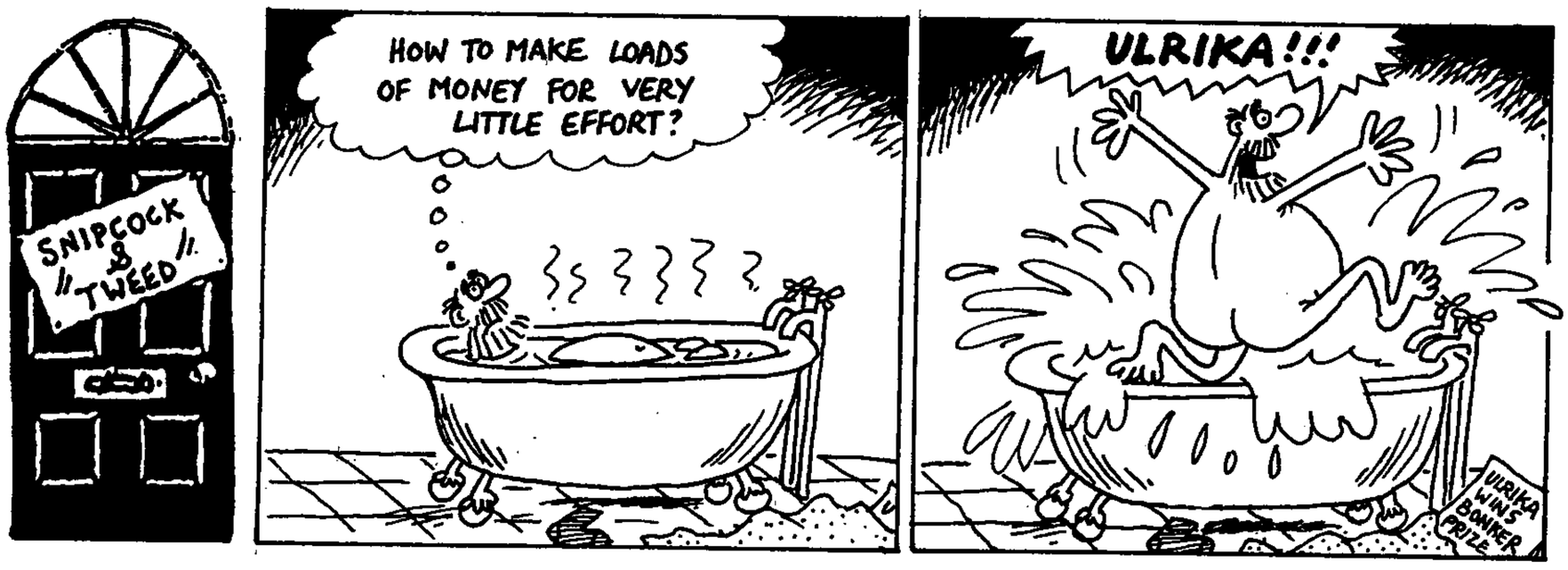
You get 18 years in 79 pages for your tenner, telling a tale so dull it gives ditchwater a bad name. The subjects are how it felt to found a career on not winning a TV show, the story behind his subsequent singles (which is that he didn't write them) and a whole chapter devoted to how much girls love him (and remember, this shag-happy sex-machine is so totally not gay that he *always* reciprocates okay? – Gareth has clearly not heard of protesting too much).

In the cat-sat-on-the-mat prose that is the parlance of the celeb glossies, we also learn when he got his first big tooth, that he's a Christian and how he wants to help the homeless. His is a story of triumph over adversity. The triumph? Not winning a TV talent show. The adversity? A stutter, which turned out to be his biggest vote-winner.

There is, however, one intriguing thing about *Right from the Start*. Throughout the text, the occasional word is highlighted in colour. As a sequence these words make three sentences, a conundrum that is by far the book's most interesting feature. Together they read "Gareth started singing every day to friends. The great response was so fantastic and girls decided they wanted to be his girlfriend. Gareth focused on music."

It's hard to avoid the conclusion that this précis of his entire life is a piss-take – a three-sentence summary of a book within that same book, as if the publishers are laughing at the futility of the whole undertaking. Let's hope all the kids out there get the message.

To bash the boy wonder himself for putting his name to a pre-Christmas cash-in is not fair. Doubtless this was an afternoon's interview with ghostwriter Sian Solanas, who by coincidence also scripted *Pop Idol: The Inside Story of TV's Biggest Ever Search for a Superstar*. Gareth is just the latest in a line of TV faces whose management look to diversify their media portfolio with random biographical flotsam peddled as the inside line. The bestsellers list in the Christmas run-in consists of Gareth Gates, George Best, Geri Halliwell, Victoria Beckham, Robbie Williams and soon Will Young, all airing their pre-laundered dirty linen. All are either tied-in to people on TV, or official TV tie-ins. But not one of them is a book in the "words with meaning" sense.



WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Baudolino

Umberto Eco

(Secker & Warburg, £18)

By now on this morning of Wednesday 14th April of the year of Our Lord 1204 for two days the barbarian horde had been in possession of Constantinople. From his eyrie high above the pulsing throng, Baudolino watched these daemons of the Antichrist embark upon their profane voyage of despoliation. Prostitutes danced wantonly upon the sacred temples before quietly vomiting over the piles of corpses or sliding fatally into the lakes of blood and horse dung.

Pausing only to dip his fingers in the exquisite sauce of marinated fish, Baudolino began, yet with greater terseness than on the seventeen preceding days, to resume his tale.

"But I was a traveller between languages. I was mixing the words of the people of Milan and Genoa, Asti and Spumante, Martini and Rosso. I had ventured into the dark forests filled with basilisks and unicorns. I don't scare easy, buster, and I don't take any shit."

"You were a ganothete," Niketas raptly interjected.

"I don't know what you mean, but yes, I admit it all. On the following night my master Bishop Otto was in despair because he could no longer find the manuscript of his *Chronica Unreliabilia*, dictated to me for ten years but which in fact I had rewritten myself. This was immediately before our Imperial patron's investiture by the Pope, you understand..."

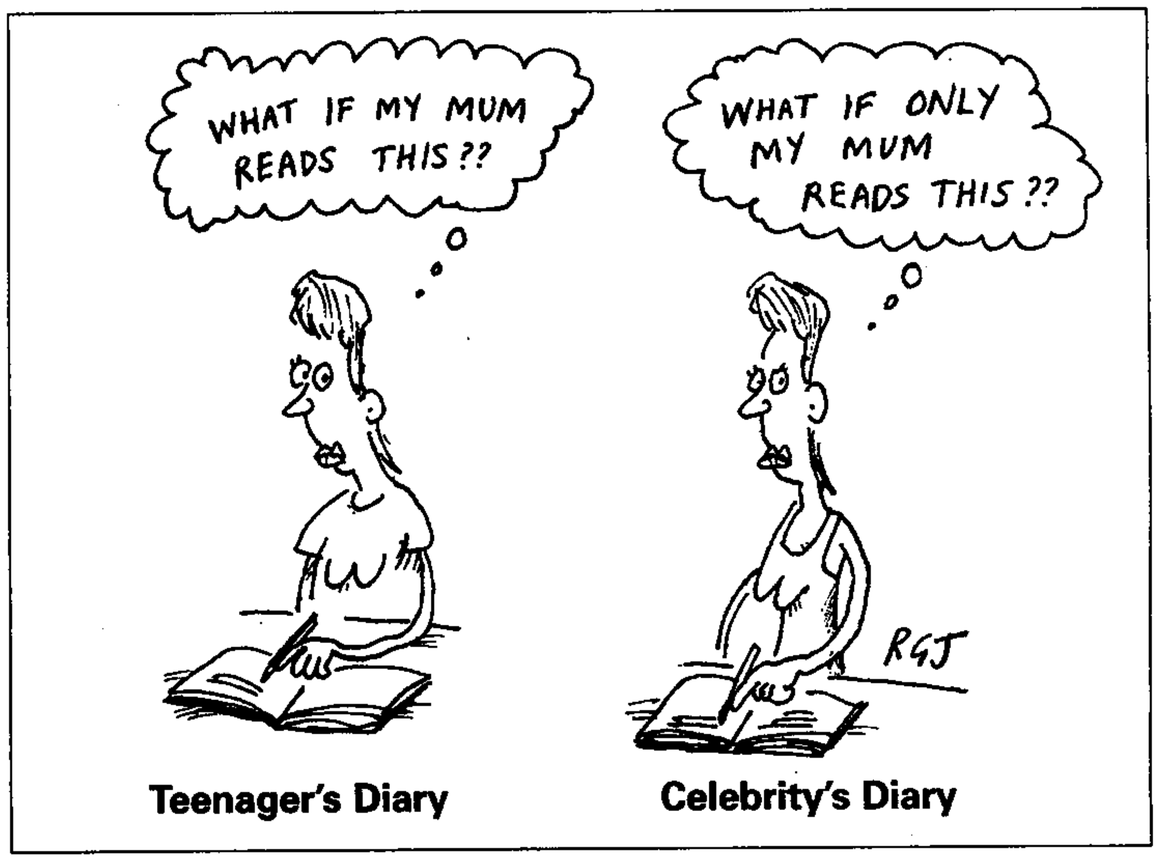
Pausing only to wave away the pertly expectant slave-girl whose eyes reminded him of a frightened kid, Niketas remarked: "That must have been a lavish ceremonial?"

"Popes? Popes are dick-heads. They play dumb and they don't realise that I'm the boy who put the tic into enigmatic. I get on much better with fauns, satyrs, pygmies, cynocephali, those kind of guys. Do you have any more of this fish sauce?"

Outside in the great square a procession of nuns were gravely removing their habits before a crowd of cheering Visigoths.

A thought struck Niketas. "You're making this up aren't you?"

"Validity, as St Salacious remarks, is in the eye of the beholder. We each of us have our destinies, master. We cannot forswear them. Mine, alas, was to provide the material for a particularly prolix post-modern historical novel. That, and to indite the three hundred amorous poems addressed to the seventy-two sages of the fabled Hibernia of Abdul, who attended by their bejewelled concubines in the remote desert of Inventa Major..." (*Continues endlessly*)



BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ IT SEEMS likely Waterstone's high command will blame the vast unsold quantities of Edwina Currie's *Diaries 1987-1992* on its poor branch managers rather than carry the can itself for backing a duffer so enthusiastically (see last *Eye*).

The head office view these days, as seen from the shop floor, is that everything they prescribe, from stock levels to window displays, is right. Thus, if the units don't shift, it must be the fault of staff in the branches.

■ TO GAIN maximum compliance with their bizarre strictures, HMV Media CEO Alan "Weasel" Giles and his newish henchman Steve Knott have been enthusiastically replacing experienced branch managers with applicants who come from other fields of retail and have no previous experience in bookselling.

At the Manchester Deansgate branch, one respected department manager was demoted and then accused, this June, of stealing £5. He was summarily dismissed. The "thief" was even denied access to evidence that, when revealed, disproved the accusation. Inexplicably he has not been reinstated and is taking Waterstone's to an employment tribunal.

Curiously, the shop's human resources manager, who would normally have handled the situation, was forced out at about the same time. A sinister conspiracy to discredit an old-school bookseller? Surely, er, Knott.

■ WRITING in the *Independent* about her experience as a Booker judge, Salley Vickers – author of *Miss Garnet's Angel* and *Instances of the Number 3* – explained that her "education was greatly advanced by the submissions".

The example she gave was when she asked a fellow judge "What does Greek mean in this context?", only to be met with the revelation that it referred to anal sex. Which of her literary colleagues filled the innocent Vickers in on this vital detail? The smart money is on David Baddiel, porn-loving comedian-cum-gentleman of letters whose debut novel *Time for Bed* contained a double-page exposition on this particular bedroom activity.

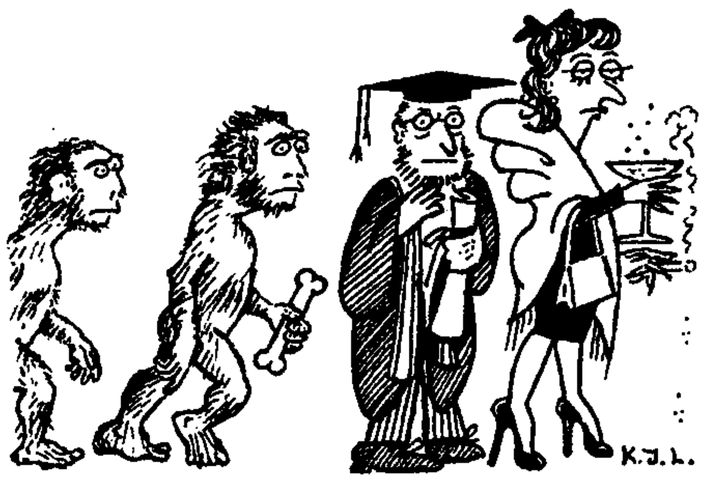
Vickers, however, pronounced herself admirably unfazed by such matters. "And sex, too, though you wouldn't think it from reading some of the submissions, is not the only reality," she explained. "As I found myself saying, rather wearily, at one meeting: "Goodness is as 'real' as a blow job". I would add that it is also rarer and arguably therefore more interesting to read about."

■ *THE estate of C.S. Lewis seems to be behaving in a rather heavy handed manner defending the old boy's creations.*

The writers and producers of a Radio 4 comedy series Concrete Cow *found themselves in receipt of a stiff letter from the C.S. Lewis Company's lawyers suggesting that the use of the word "Narnia" was a severe breach of copyright. In the show, Lewis's half-man, half-goat creation Mr Tumnus was transplanted into modern Britain and called "goatboy" by a pair of streetwise urchins.*

'Bookworm'

Pseuds Corner



As Friedrich Nietzche wrotes in *Menschliches Allzumenschliches*, "The first sign that an animal has become human is that his behaviour is no longer directed to his momentary comfort, but rather to his enduring comfort." That this becomes truer the higher up the evolutionary chain is perfectly illustrated by the pashmina, scarf of the Uberfrau – a garment conceived not for the immediate, but for the eventual (continues)

PROFESSOR GIDEON CARTER
***Sunday Times* Style Section**

As much as I think I've inspired people in the world and helped people sometimes, and as much as I think I may have done some good in the world, I'd like to be more involved in bringing about world peace.

MADONNA
quoted in *Observer*

The oak is the king of the forest. It's a very phallic, patriarchal symbol that honours male history; by felling them I'm castrating the mythology and evoking different histories.

Artist ANYA GALLACCIO discusses her Tate Britain installation, *Time Out*

It's harder. It's stronger. It's a statement, instead of, like, "Appletons"

NICOLE APPLETON explains why she and sister Natalie have removed the letter 's' from their band title, Frank Skinner Show

CONTRIBUTORS: Seb Perry, Edward Lindsay, John Bold, Steve Green, C. Tudball, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries

Pseuds Corporate

In July I announced a change to the overall structure within Supply Chain: To create increased focus and accountability for the key outcomes we require for our core end-to-end processes.

GARY MCILRAITH,
Supply Chain Director, Sky Internal Communications memo

The branding work defined the essence of BL as 'the world's knowledge'. This reflects comments from staff and users that the BL is more than just 'British'. Our new mission – 'to help people advance knowledge to enrich lives' – emphasises the fact that we make a difference to people's lives. Another area to which staff contributed was in identifying values you believed were significant to yourself and to the Library. These are: 'pride', 'relevance' and 'innovation' and will be important internally in terms of influencing the way we behave and externally in terms of how we provide and position our services. Our new logo, with its strong visibility and contemporary feel reflects these values...

JILL FINNEY, Marketing Director of the British Library, on the new branding campaign.

IN THE BACK

FALSE DAWN

WHEN £370m worth of public property was flogged off to property speculators last year, the treasury ministers responsible for the sale did not know that the purchasing company was based in a tax haven.

The reliable source for that remarkable fact is The Rt Hon "Red" Dawn Primarolo, paymaster-general. She has (at last) had to answer parliamentary questions about the sale from Tory treasury spokesman James Clappison, who must have been reading the *Eye*.

On 15 October, in a written (and unpublicised) question, Mr Clappison asked when government ministers were "informed of the decision to sell Inland Revenue buildings to Mapeley Steps Ltd, and when they were informed of the announcement by the Inland Revenue that the company was based in Britain".

Red Dawn's reply needs to be studied carefully. "The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise 'STEPS' competition was announced in August 1998. The two departments' contract with the Mapeley consortium was signed on 6 March 2001 after a full procurement exercise."

Now comes the funny bit. "A joint Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise press release dated 9th March 2001 inadvertently referred to assets being transferred to Mapeley Ltd, a UK-registered company, rather than Mapeley Steps Ltd, which is registered in Bermuda. Subsequently a separate press statement has corrected this. Ministers were not aware of the registration of Mapeley STEPS Ltd at the time of the March 2001 press notice."

The contract with the Bermuda company was

Gordon and Dawn: Tough on avoidance, not so tough on avoiders

signed on 6 March last year and the press release issued on 9 March. Red Dawn admits that on 9 March ministers did not know that the lucky purchasing company was in a tax haven, and so they could not have known about it when the contract was signed. In other words, the Inland Revenue and Customs, which are owned by the government and responsible to it, sold £370m worth of buildings to a company in a tax haven without even telling government ministers, including Red Dawn, who spends so much of her time denouncing tax avoidance through tax havens.

That is strange enough, but even stranger is the fact that when ministers eventually found out (probably by reading the *Eye*) that the sale of the buildings was a massive tax avoidance scam of the type they are continually denouncing, they did nothing about it. Nor did they intervene or complain when the Inland Revenue itself in its 2000-01 accounts (signed off in November 2001 by chairman Nick Montagu) published the entirely false fact that the buildings had been sold to a UK-registered company, Mapeley Steps Contractor Ltd. Were the Inland Revenue still trying to deceive the ministers as they did when the buildings were sold?

Mr Clappison also asked what rival bids had been received by the Revenue and Customs for their buildings. He should have known (since his government pioneered the idea) that such information, since it involves naming private companies, is secret ("commercially confidential").

But the sale of all these buildings to a tax haven company raised a more interesting point. If the company buying the buildings was based in a tax haven, and was avoiding UK tax as a result, did that not give it an unfair advantage over rival bidding companies who were paying UK tax? Red Dawn ducked this problem with her usual dexterity. "By convention," she told the Commons, "the tax affairs of individual companies are not disclosed to ministers. No separate assessment has been made of the effect of the tax status of Mapeley Steps Ltd." She did not know because she did not ask.

PS: On the same day Mr Clappison asked his question, another more mysterious one also appeared on the Commons order paper. The questioner was Tory frontbencher David Davis, former chairman of the Commons public accounts committee. His question asked the chancellor "on how many occasions a) ministers and b) treasury ministers have met Mr Patrick Butcher, former finance director of the London Underground, since 1997 and what was discussed at the meetings".

This was "answered" by the oleaginous Paul Boateng, treasury chief secretary, as follows. "Treasury ministers and officials meet a wide variety of people to discuss a wide range of issues."

Why was Mr Boateng so shy? Could he have known that Mr Butcher went on from London Underground to become finance director at Mapeley? And could his meetings with ministers and officials possibly have had anything to do with Mapeley's skilful tax avoidance through buying the buildings of the tax authorities?

MMR: A LOAD OF COCHRANE

THE Eye has long argued that some evidence cited in support of MMR safety is seriously flawed and that meaningful research comparing vaccinated and non-vaccinated children is overdue. But don't just take our word for it.

The Cochrane Collaboration, a highly-respected international group that assesses health care evidence, has concluded that most of the research into MMR safety is meaningless and some of it "lousy". In a study lead by Dr Tom Jefferson funded by the European Union, the Rome-based Cochrane vaccines unit found that only 20 of the 110 studies supposedly into all aspects of the safety of MMR were suitable for inclusion in the review because of flaws in their design. But even many of those left showed a combination of poor design, poor reporting and bias.

However Dr Jefferson concluded that on the balance of probabilities, what decent research there was suggested it unlikely that there was a link between the vaccine and autism or bowel disease; and that MMR was not only very effective at preventing the three diseases, but there appeared to be other benefits like preventing upper respiratory tract infection too.

Nevertheless he found – like the recent American Institute of Medicine report – that the case was not "proven" either way. And he criticised health departments and officials who dismiss parents' concerns and anxieties out of hand and who have not properly evaluated the research.

Dr Jefferson, who presented the broad findings of the review to the International Society of Pharmacovigilance in Amsterdam, wants a series of measures to assess the long-term effects – positive and negative – of the vaccine.

His team's findings were revealed in the same week as researchers at the University of California produced more bad news for health officials who are trying to overcome parents' mistrust of the triple jab. This team, led by Dr Robert Byrd, concluded that the recent "epidemic" of autism was not, as is often argued by health officials, simply the result of better diagnosis or statistical blips.

California, which has one of the best autism recording records in the world, had found a three-fold increase in autism rates in the last 15 years. In the UK the hike has been more dramatic; but figures on both sides of the Atlantic suggest autism among children is now running at more than one in 200.

This is a genuine and sobering increase, the authors conclude; but they are baffled as to what might be triggering what is a disaster for families and a time-bomb for already tight education, social service and health budgets.

Attempts by the researchers to evaluate any association between the vaccine and autism by looking at unvaccinated siblings failed because the numbers were too small. So where does this leave anxious parents? Still very anxious.

Dr Jefferson believes there is still information to glean from earlier work into the vaccines – if the children given placebos or not vaccinated can be traced to check their long-term health and if more raw material were made available. He also suggests that an independent body to which the public can turn for impartial advice should be set up; and he advocates a vaccine register, as in other EU countries, again with a view to comparing the health of vaccinated and non-vaccinated children.

But the government seems determined to wait for the outcome of next year's legal battle between the 1,000-plus children who are said to have been damaged and the pharmaceutical companies.

NOISES OFF

MIKE RILEY, who lives on a Heathrow flight path exactly 11.25 miles from the take-off point, did not believe aviation and government claims that aircraft are getting quieter. So one day last month he installed a noise monitor in his garden.

It showed that in a 16-hour period from 7am to 11pm, planes were regularly flying over at between 70 and 80 decibels – the equivalent, he says, of standing about 30ft from a pneumatic drill.

According to the World Health Organisation, serious disturbance is experienced if noise levels run at more than 55 decibels for periods of 16 hours or more. (For some reason the UK uses a higher threshold of 57.)

The trouble for Mr Riley and others who oppose expansion at Heathrow is that the aviation industry and government rely on the LEQ (sound level equivalent) system where quiet periods between flights are factored in too.

Including these, the overall reading from Mr Riley's garden on that noisy day was 59.2 decibels. That, you might think, still puts him over the acceptable level of noise pollution… Except the system also factors in days when there is no noise at all.

So even though Mr Riley suffers an excess of noise sometimes for days on end, when the wind is from another direction the readings come down and it doesn't look like as if he suffered any noise annoyance at all. Which is convenient.

PENSIONS

APPALLING McCARTNEY

WHEN Robert Maxwell stole his company's pension fund, the Tory government pushed through the pensions act 1995 to stop that sort of thing happening again.

Now, seven years later, under the "new" Labour, the pensions of workers in private companies are just as insecure as they were in the bad old days of Maxwell, and the government and its pensions minister Ian McCartney sorrowfully admit that there is nothing they can do about it.

Mr McCartney's sad surrender was exposed in a debate in the Commons on 16 October. The debate was launched by Derek Wyatt, Labour MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey, whose constituents include hundreds of steel workers recently made redundant when the firm ASW went into receivership.

Andy Parr: Made redundant by ASW – and will he get a pension?

To their horror, ASW workers in Kent and Cardiff are discovering that the contributions they have made all their working lives into the company's pension fund may be worth next to nothing.

The company was rich enough to pay a full pension to everyone who had retired. It could pay £62,000 in pension money to director Gerald Sheehan when he left ASW a year ago to become a director of the Royal Mint on £125,000 a year; and to another director, Bill Bagnall, when he walked out of the firm long before he got to pension age, clutching his accumulated pension fund of £81,000. But workers loyal enough to stay with the firm until it went bust will have to wait as long as five years before they know how much of the money they paid in pension contributions will come to them.

Many of them fear they will get nothing at all. The ASW case is no exception. Nearly 300 pension funds have been wound up this year. Many of the 40,000 workers affected will get little or nothing from their pension contributions. Mr Wyatt mentioned Listers in Haywood, Lancs; United Engineering Forgings in Ayr, Scotland; and the Fisher Group that took over Saphir Products. In all these cases the pensioners of the troubled firms will end up with little or nothing to show for their pension contributions. "Some of these people," said Mr Wyatt, "have worked 20, 25 or 30 years and paid £100 a month into a pension fund, and they have no rights over it."

Their situations are made worse by the behaviour of lawyers, accountants and independent trustees who fall on the bankrupt firms like vultures and can help themselves to the pickings first – even before the people who have paid into the pension fund.

Mr Wyatt asked for a government guarantee for such pensioners, paid for out of taxation. But that was far too much for Labour and Mr McCartney. In a rambling, apologetic and inconclusive speech, McCartney expressed his frustration, his anger – and his political impotence. He promised to write to the independent trustee at ASW, to the occupational pensions advisory service and to his ministerial colleagues at the department of trade and industry. Indeed, he would ensure that "no stone is left unturned" to try to resolve the questions; but really after all the stones were turned over there was nothing he could do.

A central fund guaranteeing pensioners the pension they had paid for, he whined, would "ultimately fall on taxpayers", and "there is therefore no possibility at this stage of the government acceding to this request". Indeed, he went on to argue, if the government gave such guarantees to pensioners, employers "might neglect their responsibilities and obligations to their members" (as they are demonstrably doing already all over the country).

HUMBER HUMBUG

THE PILOTS' dispute on the Humber, often reported in the *Eye*, is over, almost entirely thanks to Ministerial solidarity with the employer, the huge monopoly ABP.

When the privatised harbour authority announced that a new pilotage organisation was being set up under APB's control, the accredited pilots, members of Humber Licensed Pilots (HLP), voted overwhelmingly to reject the terms. All 136 of them were then effectively sacked and their jobs taken by "lower qualified replacements". Some have taken early retirement; others have got different (lower-paid) jobs at sea; and only 16 have taken up jobs for ABP.

Throughout there has been unconditional support for ABP from the government, its shipping ministers and the transport department. A year ago, the department, then the DTLR, was invited to send a representative to address the United Kingdom Maritime Pilots Association annual conference. The reply came from leading civil servant and marine safety expert, Andrew Burr.

He was, he explained, "required to avoid political controversy and also involvement in matters before the courts". That seemed reasonable at the time – but less so when, a few months later, the department published a 40-page document on its website entitled "The New Humber Pilotage Service". The document read as if it had been written by ABP.

There was, it assured readers, no concern over safety and no worry about the behaviour of the harbour authority (ABP). The case of the sacked pilots was not even addressed, let alone answered. The crude bias towards ABP was perhaps inevitable, since the document was put together after consulting only one body: er, ABP.

The most surprising aspect of the government's response to the dispute has been its failure to await the results of a long industrial tribunal case at which the HLP pilots' case is being examined. Five more days' hearings are scheduled for November. But even if judgment comes down in their favour, it will only cause momentary embarrassment to Labour's business-friendly ministers and do no lasting damage to ABP shareholders.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **ENVIRONMENTAL SUBSIDIES:** More on the Duke of Richmond and the Earl of March whose company, Goodwood Estates, took government subsidies for environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs) that were not environmentally sensitive at all (*Eyes passim*). Pressed by the *Eye*, the government and Defra admitted that the money overcharged by the two noblemen had been "retrieved". And how much was that? No one would say.

On 12 July the Lib Dem MP for Lewes Norman Baker asked Defra's Margaret Beckett "how much money her department has successfully reclaimed from the Duke of Richmond and the Earl of March in respect of overpayments relating to the ESA scheme". Countryside minister Elliot Morley replied for her... but didn't answer.

Mr Baker wrote again on 3 September asking for the exact sum and pointing out that the money filched by the duke and earl belonged to the taxpayer. On 20 October Mr Baker got his reply from environment minister Michael Meacher.

"When the original answer was put down we had taken the view that the detail was protected by the data protection act. In the light of the point you made in your letter, I asked for that advice to be considered again. I can now confirm that Defra recovered £39,524.33 from the Goodwood Estate Company. This sum represents the total payments on the area where a breach of the ESA scheme occurred, plus interest."

The significance is the admission that the exact amount of taxpayers' money doled out to landowners in ESA is not protected by any secrecy law and can be disclosed whenever anyone asks for it.

■ **YARL'S WOOD:** Official silence in the continuing cover-up of what happened at the detention centre for asylum seekers that burnt down last February has been rudely shattered by a front-page article on 20 October in *Bedfordshire on Sunday*.

The paper returned to the mystery of why the centre was not fitted with sprinklers and revealed that the cost of installing them "started out at £335,000" but "increased to £14m by the time the decision reached the home office". Since the entire cost of three detention centres built at the time, including Yarl's Wood, was £140m, this was sensational news.

The home office told the newspaper it could not comment "because there is an ongoing investigation". This was a reference to the inquiry into the disturbances carried out by Stephen Moore, a senior home office civil servant, which has been going on for nine months. But when the *Eye* contacted the home office about the *BoS* story, a spokesman conceded that the Moore inquiry would not deal with the failure to install sprinklers or the cost of them, but was concerned solely with the disturbances.

So, we asked, were the figures for installing the sprinklers accurate? Was there a grotesque increase in installation costs of several thousand percent? "I can't comment on the figures," said the spokesman. "They are commercially sensitive, commercial in confidence." The *Eye* protested that these sums were to be paid out by the taxpayer, who would now have to pay the entire cost of replacing the burnt-out centre. But the spokesman was adamant. He could not say anything about the cost of the sprinklers.

He did, however, stick to the original home office story that cost was not the only reason for not installing sprinklers. This assurance conflicts directly with the evidence of the then chief fire officer for Bedfordshire, Jeff Goddard, who told local Tory MP Alastair Burt a quite different story. He revealed that at a meeting with home office officials in early 2001, the fire officers had passionately argued for sprinklers, but they were turned down by the head of the immigration service "on ground of cost" (*Eye* 1049).

PS: The company responsible for building and staffing Yarl's Wood was GAIL, a delightful acronym for two of New Labour's favourite and most disastrous private companies: Group 4 and Amey Immigration Ltd.

■ **ASYLUM CLAIMS:** Two men and a woman who fled Zimbabwe have had their asylum claims rejected by the home office – partly because the immigration adviser representing them had been working illegally.

The adviser was none other than Jacob Moyo (see *Eyes passim*), who managed to get home office registration as an approved adviser when he had no rights to work in Britain and was only struck off after clients complained that he was incompetent.

Only home secretary David Blunkett's department could fail to protect asylum seekers from the likes of Moyo – and then use that against them in their asylum claims.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

FURTHER evidence of the profitless prosperity that is a hallmark of so much of the Fayed empire emerges from the latest results from the Ritz hotel in Paris, with Harrods the jewel in the phoney pharaoh's crown.

Once again the Ritz lost money (it has rarely if ever been profitable since Fayed acquired it more than 20 years ago). And last year the loss almost doubled to £2.3m from £1.27m in 2000.

With some justification – unlike when he blamed the foot and mouth epidemic for disappointing figures at Harrods for a period before the first outbreak – Fayed blames the impact of 11 September and the US recession for the drop in occupancy at the hotel. However, turnover was only marginally lower at £35m.

More to blame were higher costs and, in particular, a 50 percent jump in interest charges to £4.7m following the new loan negotiated with Fayed's biggest lender, Royal Bank of Scotland.

RBS, which has loaned Fayed some £350m on Harrods, has lent him a further £88m on the Ritz. Fayed used the new eight-year loan to repay an existing German bank loan in July last year. But whereas he only owed the Germans £59m, he immediately borrowed £88m from RBS. All but a fraction of that extra £29m had been spent or transferred elsewhere within a matter of months.

Most of this money seems to have been sent up the corporate food chain to the two offshore companies through which Fayed owns the hotel in Jersey and Luxembourg. RBS now has a charge on these shares as security for its loan. The bulk of the loan – £80m – is not repayable until 2009.

The suspicion must be that at least some of this money loaned for the Ritz has found its way via the offshore network into other needy causes such as Fulham and the Fayed lifestyle.

Fayed continues to use the Ritz company as a private piggy bank. It advanced him £160,000 during the year which he repaid by year end to avoid it being classed as a director's loan and taxable. The previous year he borrowed £229,000 on the same basis. These types of transactions are now under review by the Inland Revenue which has all Fayed's offshore companies under the microscope following the scrapping of his fixed payment tax deal last May.

Fayed is expecting results from the Ritz to improve in the current year which ends in December. But not enough to produce a profit given that interest bill. Meanwhile the world waits to see the extent of the bad news from what was once the top people's store due in November.

WITHIN days of the last *Eye* being published highlighting the political sensitivities that often surround prominent Russian businessmen, the presence in London of former Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky looks set to create another problem in relations between London and Moscow just when Tony Blair wants his friend President Putin onside at the UN for war with Iraq.

Once again the Russians have accused Berezovsky of a criminal offence – a fraud involving more than 2000 cars worth $13m in 1994-95 through the LogoVAZ dealership he ran. LogoVAZ sold cars from the old state-owned AvtoVAZ car plant – the alleged victim.

It was while running LogoVaz that Berezovsky first attracted international attention after an attempt was made in 1994 to blow him up with a remotely controlled car bomb as he drove from the company's Moscow headquarters. Berezovsky survived but his chauffeur did not. The attack came at the height of a bloody war in Moscow

"We decided to retire early and live off our pensions"

between the Slav and Chechen gangs. Berezovsky blamed business and political rivals. Those responsible were never caught.

As before the Russians are threatening to seek Berezovsky's extradition. "We have no doubts that the law enforcement bodies in Britain will comply with our request for extradition," declared deputy prosecutor general Vladimir Kolesnikov last week. "All extradition documents have been prepared."

Berezovsky laughed off the charges. "There is absolutely no chance that Britain will extradite me," he told *Moscow Times*, pointing out that this was the fifth or sixth "crime" with which he had been charged. Berezovsky has always maintained these charges were trumped up for political reasons.

If proved to be true then Britain would be very unlikely to extradite him – assuming a request were made officially. But the new extradition agreement signed last year remains to be tested. And certainly Britain would not want to upset Putin right now and further encourage him to use his veto in the UN security council against "Dubya" and his dream of finishing what his Daddy started.

As revealed in the last *Eye*, post 11 September when Britain and the US also wanted to keep Putin sweet, the British authorities discouraged self-exiled Russian oligarchs like Berezovsky and Vladimir Guzinsky from visiting Britain following the signing of the new extradition agreement. It was discreetly pointed out that no guarantee could be given that any Russian extradition request would not be acted upon. So an arrest was possible even if the home secretary did not agree to extradition.

Once the 11 September crisis had passed then the signal was changed to "all clear" – which is no doubt why (together with the political persecution argument and lack of evidence) Berezovsky felt confident enough to make his base in London. But Iraq could change all that again. Especially if the Russians do what they have never done before and actually make an extradition request to Britain.

The latest development will also embarrass Barclays, which is said to be sitting on most of the £1.5bn Berezovsky is said to control outside Russia. Banks must today be very careful in their dealings with PEPs – "politically exposed persons". The latest charges against Berezovsky, no matter how fanciful or politically motivated, are likely to set alarm bells ringing at Barclays and other banks, particularly if the extradition request is made.

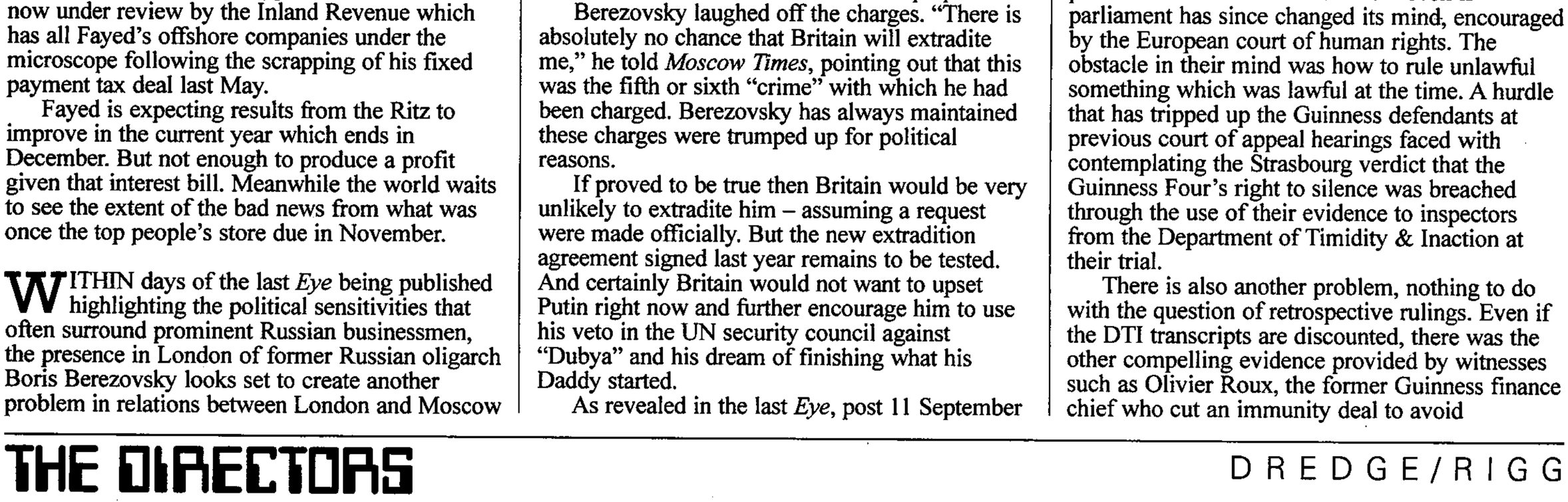
WHY should it be regularly gossiped among financial circles in Jersey that one of its leading politicians has links to a local building company that is suspected of connections with the IRA?

Examination of company records and individuals involved indicate no evidence of such a link but still the rumours persist.

THE latest round in the 12-year legal battle to reverse the Guinness verdicts ended with the result depending on the reserved judgment of the latest five great legal minds to address this long-running question.

Lawyers for the Guinness Four were not encouraged by the comments made by two of the law lords – Millett and Hoffmann – who raised the legitimate question as to how can it be said that a verdict was wrong if it was right as far as parliament had ruled at the time – even if parliament has since changed its mind, encouraged by the European court of human rights. The obstacle in their mind was how to rule unlawful something which was lawful at the time. A hurdle that has tripped up the Guinness defendants at previous court of appeal hearings faced with contemplating the Strasbourg verdict that the Guinness Four's right to silence was breached through the use of their evidence to inspectors from the Department of Timidity & Inaction at their trial.

There is also another problem, nothing to do with the question of retrospective rulings. Even if the DTI transcripts are discounted, there was the other compelling evidence provided by witnesses such as Olivier Roux, the former Guinness finance chief who cut an immunity deal to avoid

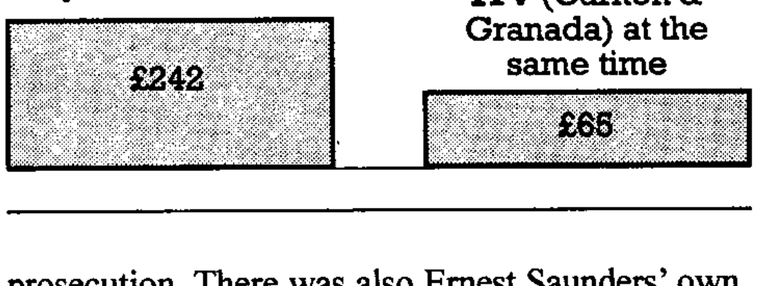


Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

ITV merges – but the management remains

Value of £100 invested eight years ago in...



prosecution. There was also Ernest Saunders' own evidence as the only defendant to testify.

In the past judges have felt with some justification that there was enough other evidence to safely convict excluding the DTI transcripts. This is certainly true of Saunders and to a lesser extent with his little helpers – Gerald Ronson, Jack Lyons and Anthony Parnes.

How the law lords will rule remains to be seen, probably before the end of the year. But the defendants' hopes were dented even before the start of the three-day hearing when they discovered that the panel of judges was not the more sympathetic one they had expected.

It was initially hoped that they might be facing not just the lord chief justice Lord Bingham, who had backed retrospective rulings post the human rights act in a previous unconnected case, but also Lord Steyn, who had voted for retrospectivity as the dissenting minority in the Lambert case last year, as well as Lord Scott, a well known liberal.

Well they did indeed get Lord Bingham but instead of Steyn and Scott there were Lords Millett and Hoffmann as well as Lord Hutton, who had voted with the majority in Lambert and confirmed his opinion against the retrospective application of the human rights act in the subsequent Kansal case where the Lords remarkably ruled that even though the Lambert ruling was wrong it should not be changed.

If the law lords rule that the Guinness convictions should not be quashed on human rights grounds, then expect the defendants to suggest that the government intervened to chose a more sympathetic panel. But if that is the verdict, don't be surprised if the Guinness Four go back to Strasbourg and ask for a ruling that Britain must abide by its international obligations and comply with the previous Strasbourg rulings in favour of the defendants.

THOSE who argue with some considerable justification that the government should end self-regulation of the horse racing industry in the wake of the revelations by former Jockey Club security chief Roger Buffham and the past record of Buffham himself as a business associate of South Africa's "Doctor Death" Wouter Basson also point to the far from glorious City past of the chief steward Christopher Spence.

When a stockbroker Spence was deeply embroiled in the E.J. Austin "crock of gold" scandal of the early 70s which resulted in a DTI investigation when the mine turned out to be fictional and investors lost everything.

More recently Spence, as chairman of a small merchant bank, English Trust, was criticised and fined by the Securities & Futures Authority in 1997 for failing to ensure that sub-underwriters could pay for shares they agreed to take. When two underwriters failed to take up shares English Trust went to a third which also failed to pay. English Trust was fined £40,000 while Spence was fined £5,000 and reprimanded. But this was seen as no reason to disqualify him from being chief steward in the same way that helping Basson and refusing to testify against him was seen as no reason by the Jockey Club not to employ Buffham.

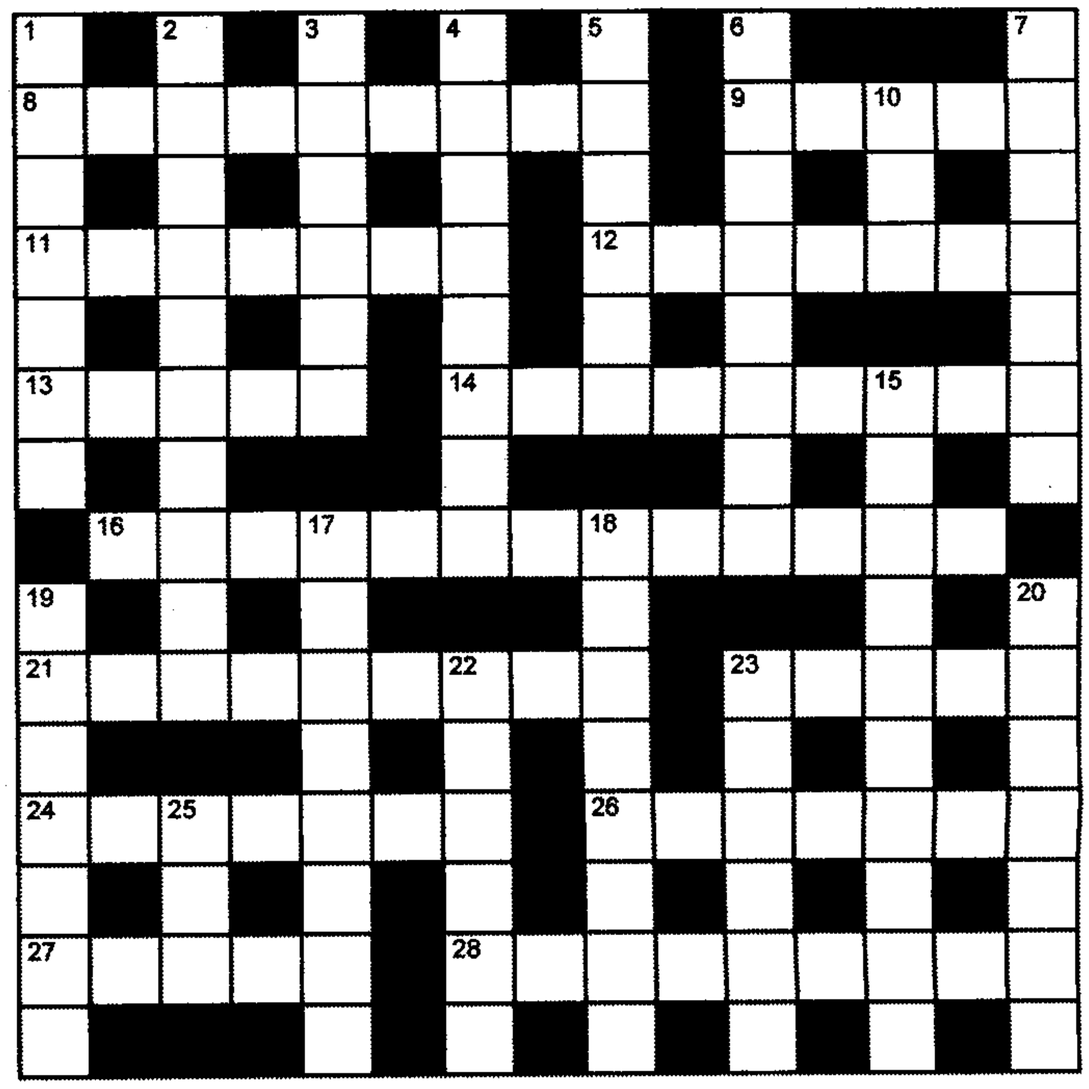
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 221

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 8 November 2002.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

8 What you'd expect from a love rat's smart penetration of poor Terry (9)

9 Contribution from Ulster-backed leader not popular (5)

11 Like something to protect the testicles? Smear castor oil at the end (7)

12 Disreputable type of article by pisspoor tabloid lacking interest (1,3,3)

13 All possible when woman gets randy and takes off (5)

14 Tale of Brown having first sign of nerves during group sex (9)

16 Curious extended viewing of Johnny having a snog (13)

21 Strange start to upper hand foreplay (7-2)

23 In gobbling, one's tongue appears coarse (5)

24 The one 14 ac. fad without rip-off (7)

26 Extracts from Bird's *Universal Leaves Pornographic Bastards Outside* (7)

27 Country type pissed without money (5)

28 Does too much, making deliveries to parties around the Home Counties (9)

DOWN

1 Was a model stuck up in Slough concealed? (7)

2 Dubya's no leader of West according to one of his sources (6,4)

3 Disorganised sex started as 'pussy' (6)

4 Pick Rose to shag before anyone else? (8)

5 Active type Andy screwed ex-minister (6)

6 Date with girl on bed took off (3,1,4)

7 Bill's monumental erection captivating model (7)

10 Area surrounding genitals served up as boxer's grub? (3)

15 'Theatre-balls' is eminently sensible (2-8)

17 Champ takes off liar in the mould of the PM (8)

18 Guys swear by Italian girls in extremely skimpy tops (8)

19 *Killer Queen* hardly Queen-like to start with (7)

20 Get hold of legal packs on The Origin of Sodomy (7)

22 Sort of business quickly caught going arse up in disaster? (3-3)

23 Clinton's erection not long, I note, to engender sexual appetite (6)

25 Air and stuff (3)

Crossword 220 winner: DAVID RABJOHNS

ACROSS: 7 Bum-fluff 9 Ice axe 10 Escort 11 Excuse-me 12 Hat trick 14 Fawns 16 Humpback bridges 18 Scant 19 Assholes 22 Castrati 23 T-shirt 25 Uppity 26 Go public.

DOWN: 1 Putsch 2 Afro 3 Cut-throat 4 Bitch 5 Sex scandal 6 Examinee 8 French kissing 13 Top and tail 15 Archetype 17 Unclasps 20 Sordid 21 Satyr 24 Hobo.

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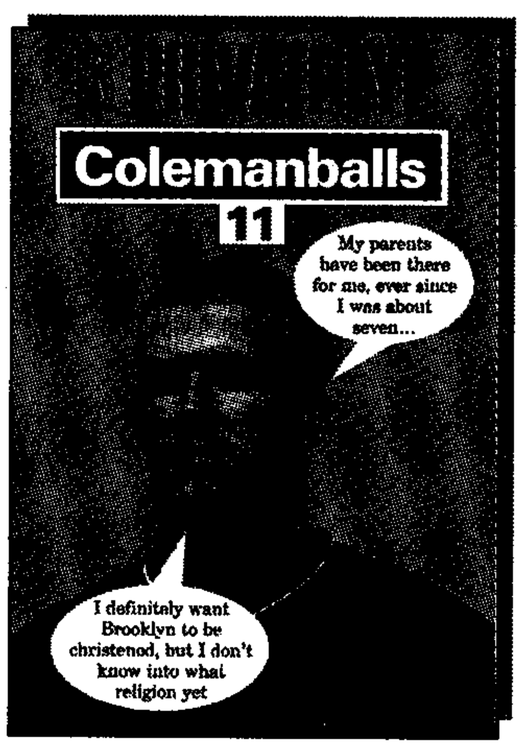
Colemanballs 11
My parents have been there for me, ever since I was about seven...
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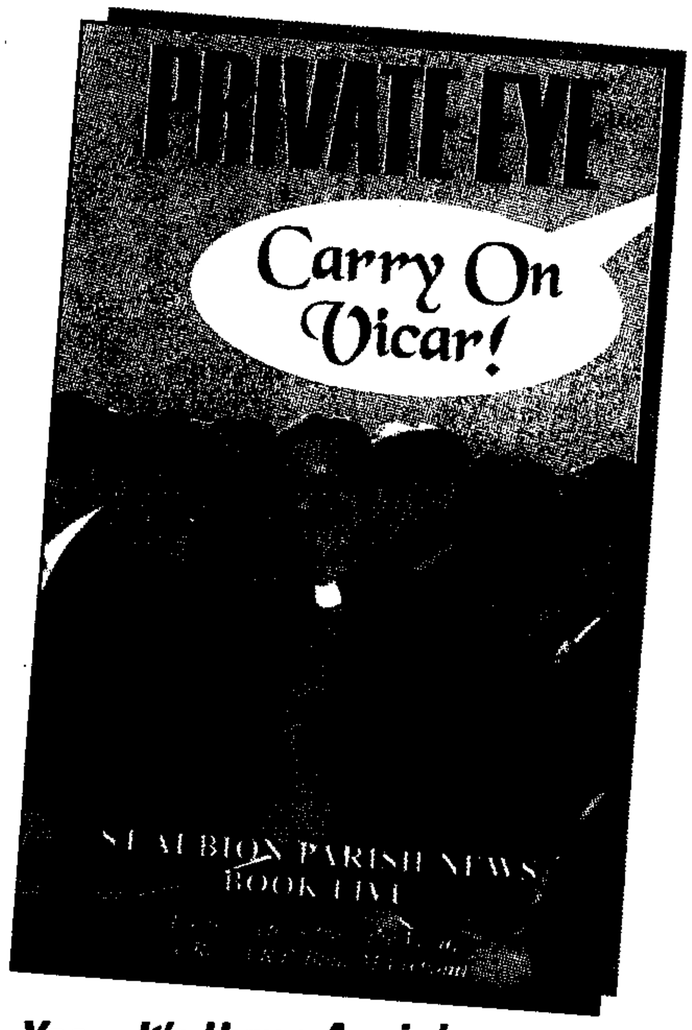

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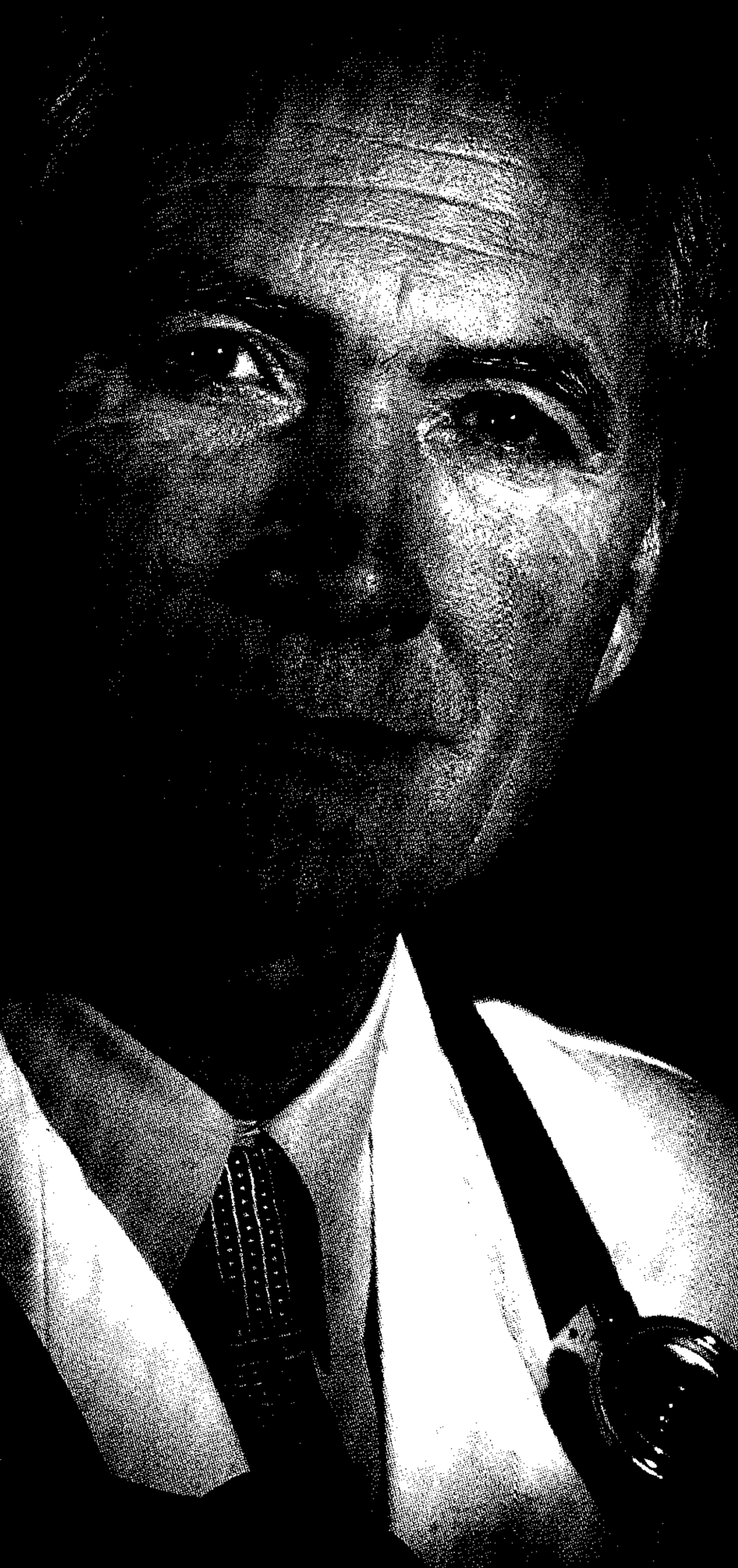

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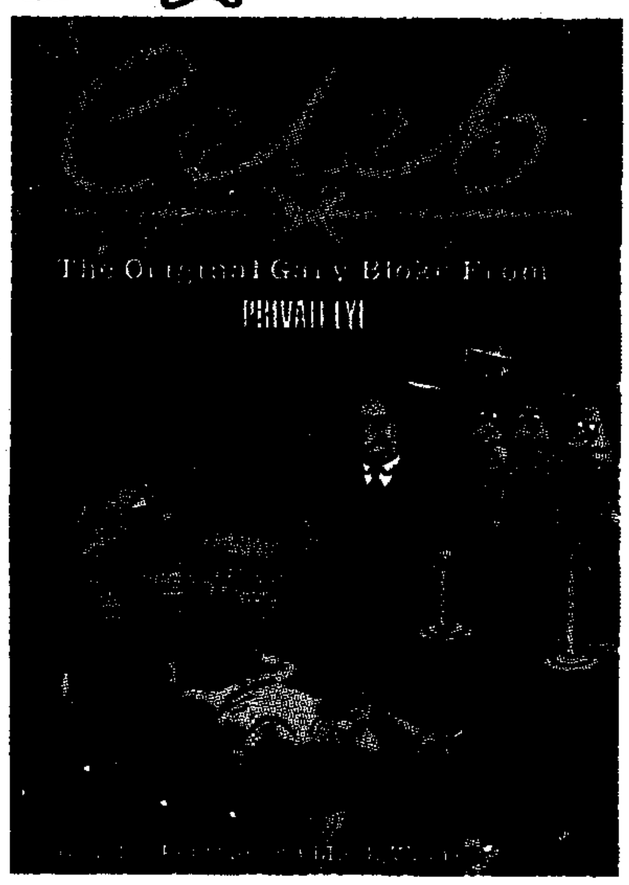

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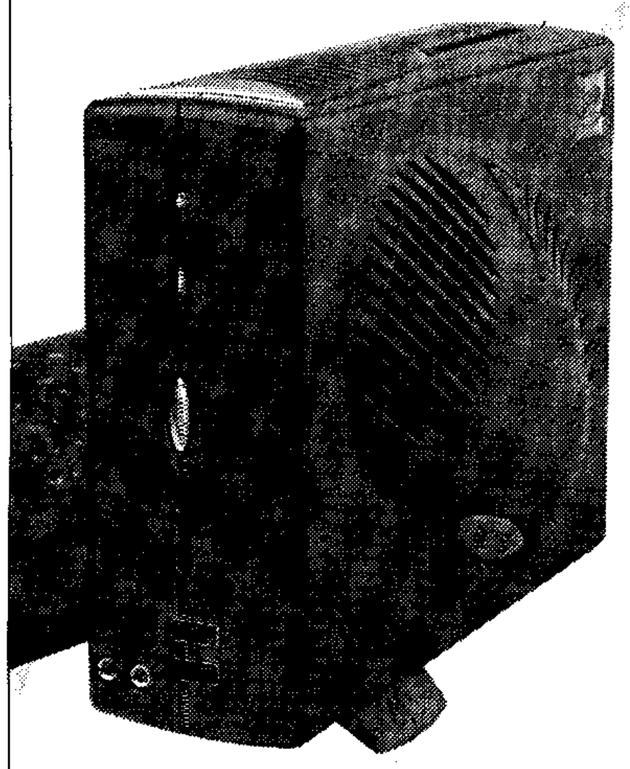

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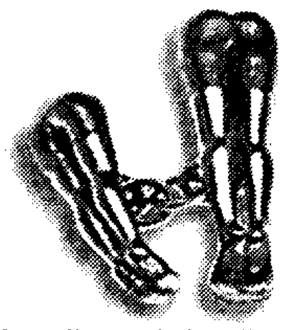

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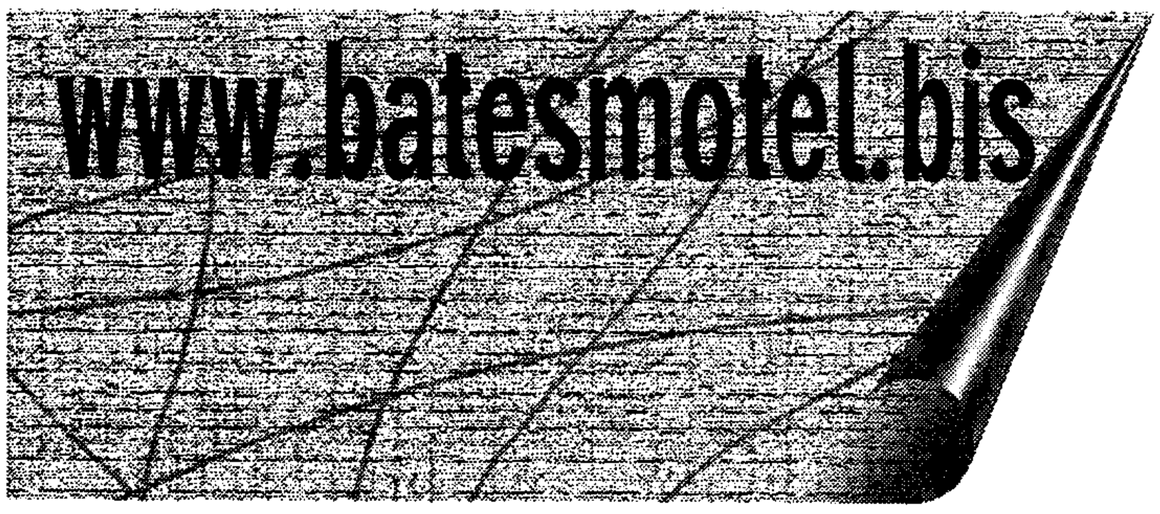

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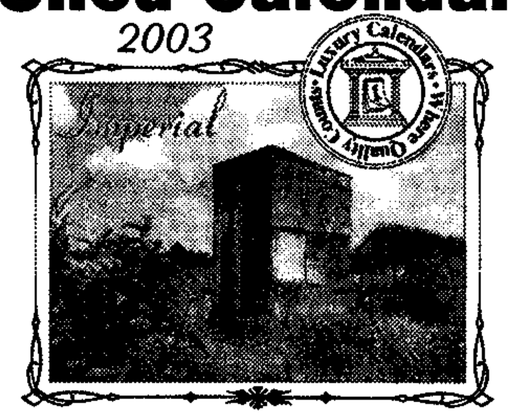

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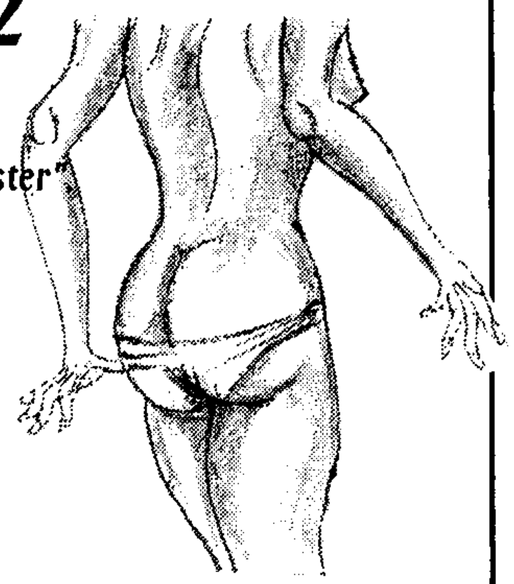

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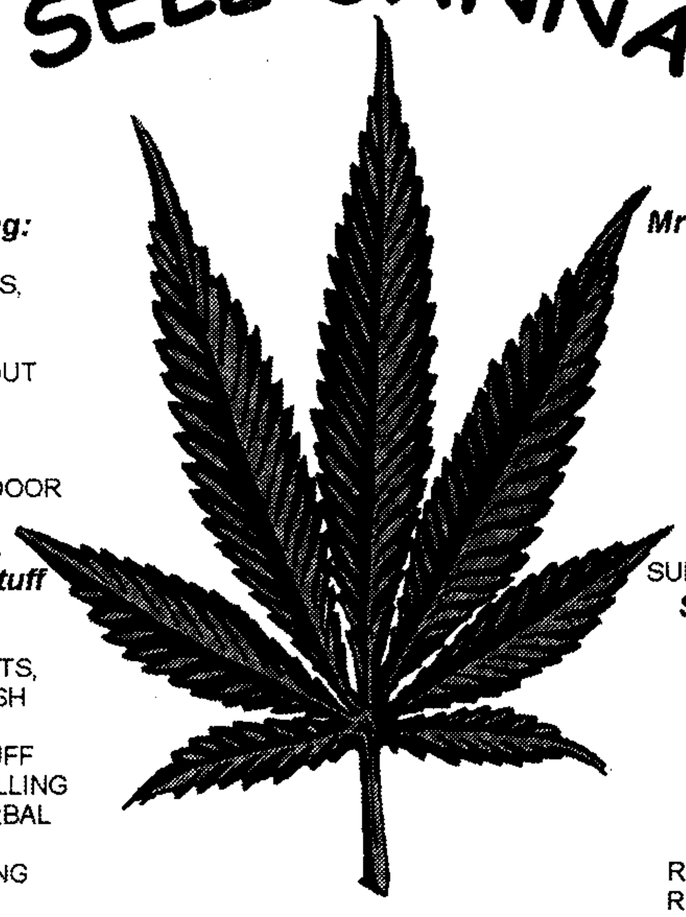

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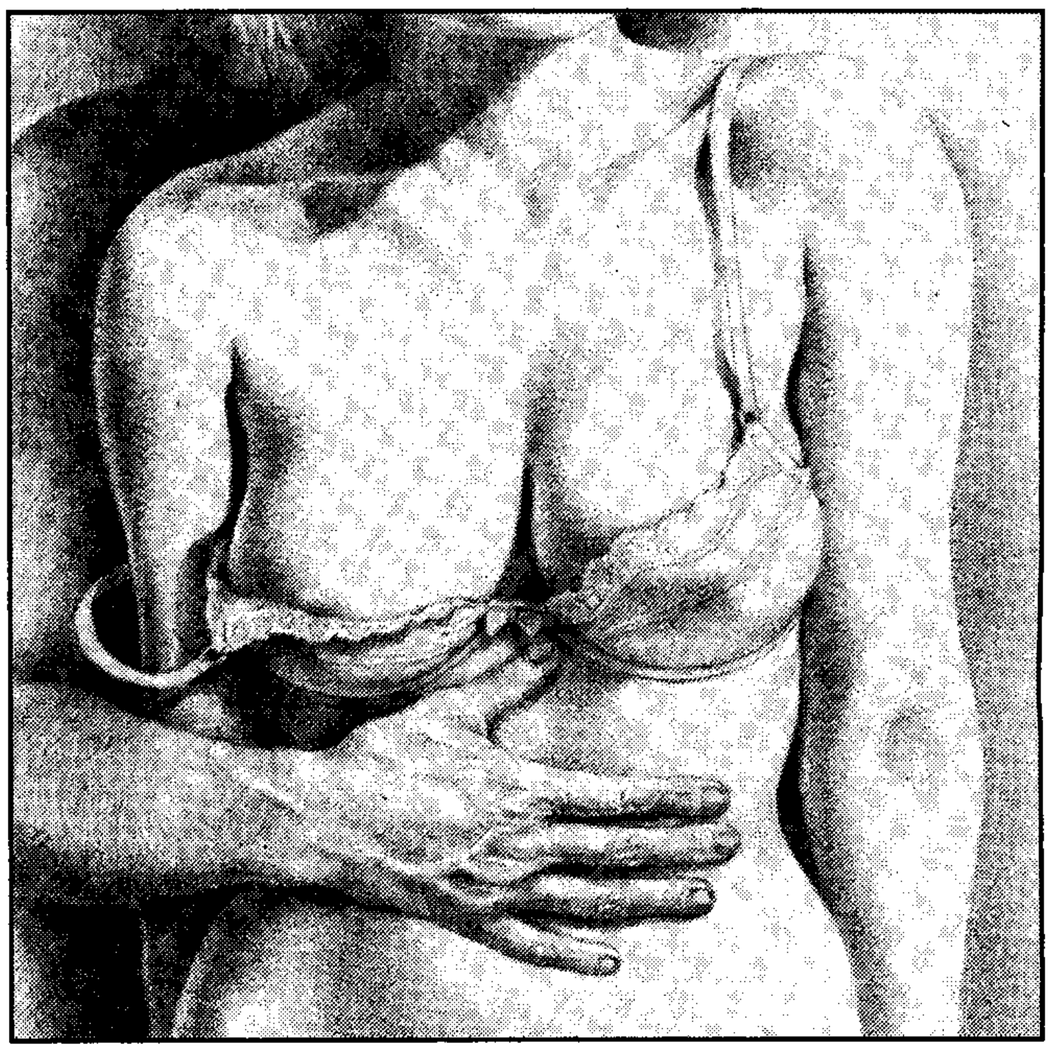

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FRENCH LAWYER, £8000 debt (conversion English Solicitor). Desperate. beatomisa@hotmail.com Natwest 60-80-08/16684575.

EX TRAINING SOLICITOR needs £12,000 to pay off debts from law school fees following career change. Barclays 20-17-19, 00948055.

HELP URGENTLY SOUGHT. £20,000 debt burden from ill-health and unemployment. Sincere gratitude. RBS 16-32-45, 10046536.

HIGH VET BILLS – charity animal clinic needs funds – RBS-16-20-38 10022270.

SELF-FINANCING STUDENT needs funds desperately to start Phd. at Cardiff. Alliance/Leicester 72 58 10 / 00000000204331383O5. www.cymru9.fsnet.co.uk/Martyns_site/homex.html

AFRICAN HANG GLIDING expedition needs to raise £11,000. TV documentary arranged

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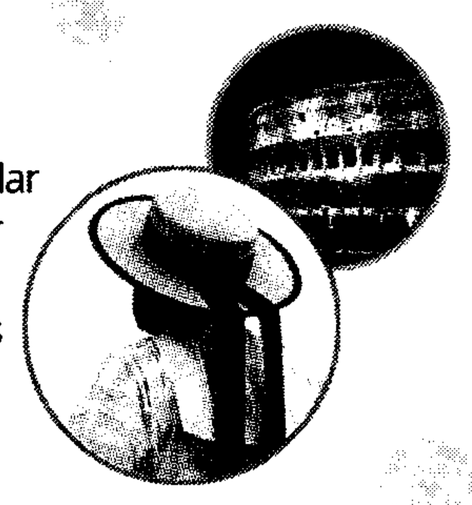

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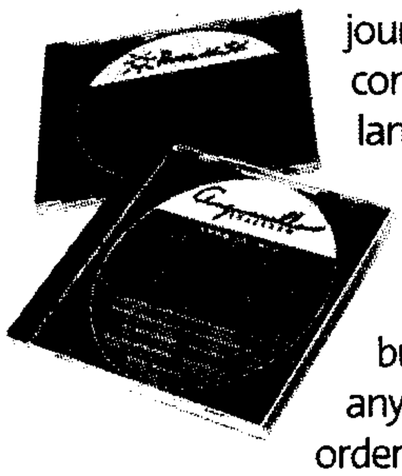

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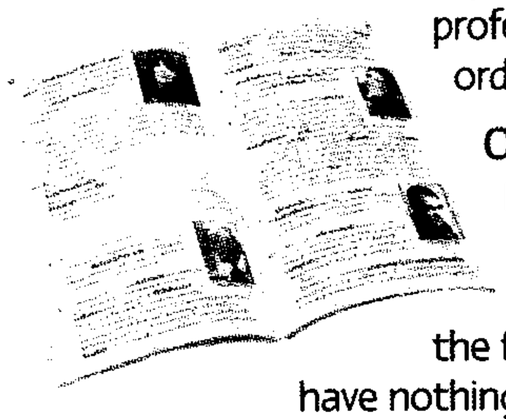

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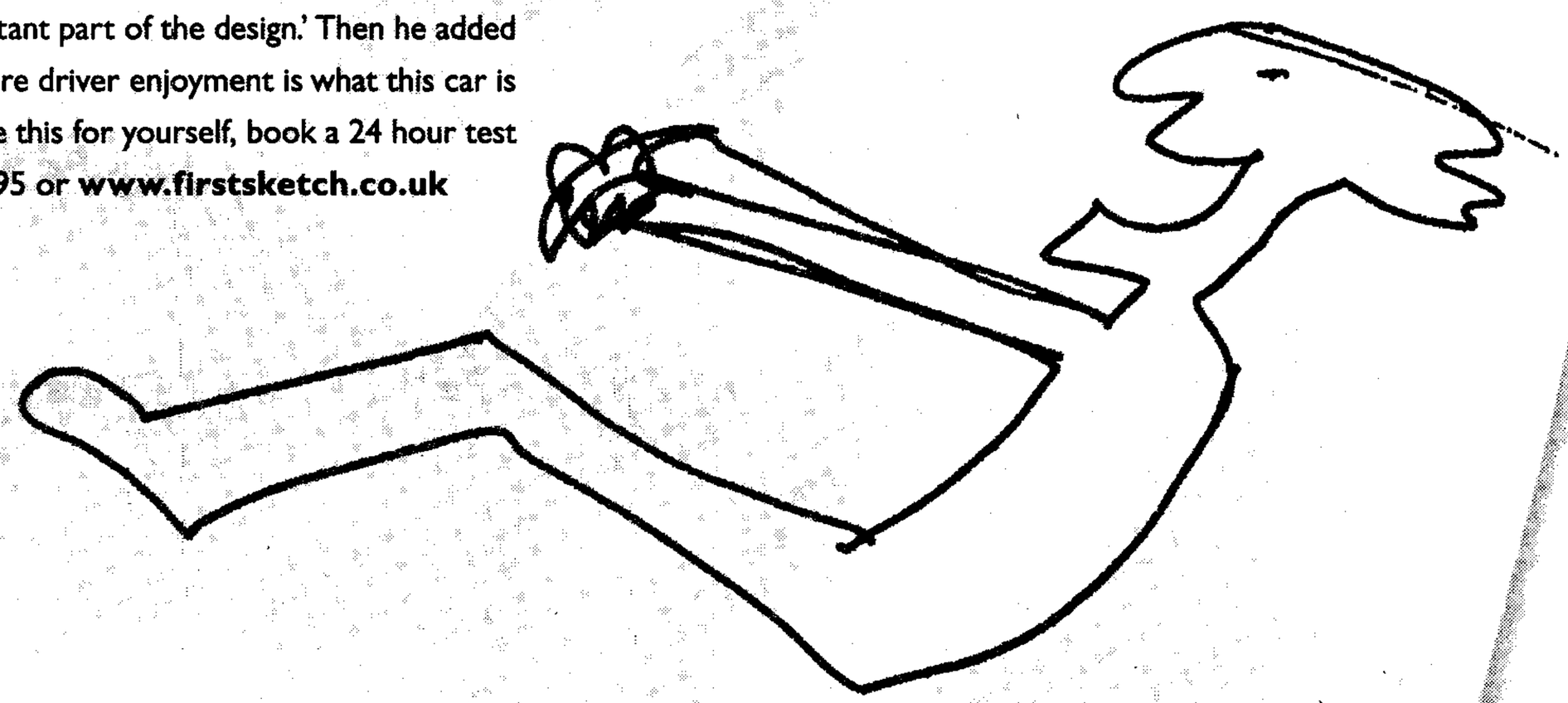

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